Theodicy of Eros Revisited: Why Imperfect Marriage Is Central Now and Yet Not Final

Douglas C. Youvan

doug@youvan.com

www.youvan.ai

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The question “Why would God end marriage?” often sounds harsh because it feels like a second loss added to the first: death breaks the most intimate human bond, and resurrection appears not to restore that bond in its familiar form. But the harshness lessens when we admit a fact so obvious we usually skip it: no human marriage has ever been perfect. Even the best marriages carry fear, misalignment, scarcity, misunderstanding, power imbalance, bodily frailty, and the shadow of death. If that is true, then the moral problem shifts. The issue is no longer whether God discards a perfect good, but whether God refuses to canonize a compromised form as the final shape of love. This paper reframes “no marriage in the resurrection” as a theodicy question about the destiny of created goods: can God be good if the goods that make life meaningful are temporary, wounded, and then apparently set aside? We develop two models—abolition and fulfillment—but refine them: fulfillment must account not only for continuity of love but for the healing of what marriage was compensating for. The central claim is that marriage is a real created good and a real moral school, yet also a protective institution under conditions of sin and death. Resurrection hope must therefore promise not less intimacy, but intimacy released from the need for scarcity-driven structures.

Keywords: theodicy, eros, marriage, resurrection, heaven, family, desire, intimacy, covenant, exclusivity, scarcity, death, grief, hope, theological anthropology, creation and fall, redemption, fulfillment, transfiguration, beatitude, communion, attachment, pastoral theology, spiritual formation.

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1. Framing the Problem: Why "No Marriage" Feels Like a Moral Scandal

The shock does not come mainly from doctrine; it comes from love. People do not stumble over the claim "no marriage in the resurrection" because they are overly attached to ceremony, legal status, or social custom. They stumble because marriage, at its best, is the most concentrated form of ordinary human belonging: chosen loyalty, embodied intimacy, shared history, shared suffering, and shared hope. It is the place where desire becomes covenant, where attraction becomes responsibility, where affection becomes a home.

So when the New Testament presents resurrection life as real, embodied, and glorious, but also says that people "neither marry nor are given in marriage," many hear a moral insult hidden inside a promise. If resurrection is restoration, why does it not restore what mattered most? If heaven is the healing of what death broke, why does it appear to ratify the end of marriage rather than undo it?

This is why the question belongs to theodicy. Theodicy is not only the problem of evil in the abstract; it is the problem of whether God's goodness can be trusted when the goods we built our lives around are fragile, partial, and then apparently retired. If marriage and family are central goods—goods that form persons and anchor meaning—then their apparent temporariness is not a small puzzle. It presses directly on the moral credibility of the story.

The task of this paper begins here: to take the shock seriously without retreating into either sentimentality ("surely we'll be married forever") or abstraction ("marriage doesn't matter anyway"). The goal is to frame the problem with precision, then build a scripturally constrained and pastorally honest account of what could be meant by "no marriage" that does not reduce the goodness of marriage to a disposable prop.

1.1 The "double loss" experience: death ends marriage and heaven seems to confirm the ending

The first loss is obvious: death. Marriage is designed for permanence, but every marriage ends—either through betrayal or through death. Even in faithful marriages, the vow "until death do us part" is not a poetic flourish; it is a structural admission that the world is not safe enough for love to remain unthreatened. People who have loved deeply know that this is not merely sad; it is morally enraging. It is not only that we lose a spouse. It is that the most meaningful form of human union is placed under a deadline.

The second loss is subtler and therefore more scandalizing. It arises when believers read the resurrection promises and discover that the future life is not described as the continuation of marriage. Instead, marriage appears to be absent—not as a tragedy, but as a feature. The reader hears: "Yes, death took your marriage. And no, the institution does not return." That can sound like the afterlife does not repair the wound but spiritualizes around it.

This “double loss” produces a distinctive kind of grief:

- The grief of mortality: the beloved is taken.
- The grief of meaning: the structure that gave love its home is declared non-final.

That second grief easily becomes resentment, not toward death, but toward the story itself. The believer may say, sometimes quietly, sometimes angrily: “If marriage is the center of my life, and heaven does not include it, then heaven is not the restoration of my life. It is a different life. And if it is a different life, then what exactly is being saved?”

That is not a childish question. It is the adult question of whether salvation preserves the most precious human realities or replaces them with something we are told we will like once we are no longer ourselves.

The “double loss” experience is intensified by the fact that marriage is not only romantic but familial. It is the generator of the household and the seedbed of generativity: children, shared duties, sacrifices, mutual care, and the moral education of the heart. For many people, marriage is where they learned what love actually costs. To hear that the form of marriage does not continue can sound like the eternal world has no use for the deepest moral schooling that love required here.

This is why the problem cannot be solved by telling people “you won’t care then.” That answer is psychologically cruel and theologically suspicious. It implies that heaven is achieved by the erasure of attachments rather than by their redemption. Such an answer might quiet a debate, but it will not heal the moral wound that the “double loss” opens.

1.2 Theodicy scope: what God’s goodness must mean when central human goods are fragile

Theodicy is often framed as a response to evil: suffering, injustice, cruelty, and unexplained pain. But underneath these lies a more intimate question: can God be trusted with love? If God is good, then the goods that make life meaningful should not be bait. They should not function as instruments that teach us by being ripped away, leaving us to call the ripping “wisdom.”

When marriage is treated as central to human flourishing, its fragility under death and sin becomes a direct test of divine goodness. A good God can permit hardship, but the permission must not imply contempt for what God created. Theodicy at this level asks:

- Does God honor created goods by preserving them, or by transcending them?
- If goods are transcended, are they honored in the process, or negated?
- Can a good God ask us to love deeply in time if the structures of love are ultimately discarded?

- If the final world is one in which marriage does not exist, was marriage truly a core good or merely a temporary coping mechanism for loneliness and lust?

These questions push beyond emotion into moral logic. They require that we clarify what "goodness" means when applied to God. At minimum, goodness must include a refusal to trivialize the human goods through which God taught us to love. A good God may not owe us the continuation of every familiar structure, but God must not design love so that love's highest forms become, in hindsight, mistakes.

This is where "no marriage in the resurrection" becomes a theodicy pressure point. If it is interpreted as abolition—meaning marriage and its distinctive goods are simply removed—then the story risks making God appear like a teacher who uses the sweetest things to train us and then discards them. But if it is interpreted as fulfillment—meaning the goods marriage carried are preserved, healed, and enlarged into a more stable form—then the story can remain morally coherent. Theodicy turns on this distinction.

A disciplined theodicy of eros must therefore satisfy at least four moral constraints:

- The no-trivialization constraint: marriage cannot be treated as "just a metaphor" if it was a real created good.
- The no-setup constraint: God cannot appear to build us around attachment only to mock attachment as immature.
- The no-erasure constraint: the final hope cannot depend on making us indifferent to what was rightly loved.
- The no-fantasy constraint: comfort must be truthful; we cannot protect goodness by denying what Scripture says.

These constraints define the paper's scope. We are not trying to build a sentimental heaven. We are trying to test whether Christian hope can speak to the deepest loves of ordinary life without moral evasion.

1.3 Definitions and distinctions: eros, marriage, sexuality, family, intimacy, exclusivity, communion

Precision matters because the entire scandal can be intensified by sloppy terms. People hear "no marriage" and assume "no intimacy." Others hear "no marriage" and assume "sex was sinful." Others hear "no marriage" and assume "God is anti-family." Many of these reactions arise because key terms are fused that need to be distinguished.

The paper uses the following working distinctions.

Eros: not merely "sex," but the whole spectrum of desiring love—attraction, delight in the beloved, longing for union, and the impulse toward shared life. Eros can be bodily, emotional, and imaginative. It can be disordered (possessive, compulsive, idolatrous), or it can be sanctified (truthful, faithful, oriented toward the good).

Sexuality: the embodied capacity for sexual desire and sexual union, including biological differentiation, arousal, fertility, and the bodily language of union. Sexuality is one dimension of eros, but eros is broader than sexuality.

Marriage: a public covenantal institution that binds two persons into an exclusive-priority union with moral obligations, social recognition, and typically an ordered relationship to household formation and childrearing. Marriage is not reducible to romance; it is a vocation and a structure of responsibility.

Family: the household and kinship network that flows from marital union and generativity, including the roles, duties, and moral formation that arise from living with and caring for others across generations.

Intimacy: personal closeness involving knowledge, trust, vulnerability, affection, and shared life. Intimacy can be sexual, but it is not necessarily sexual. Intimacy includes friendship, parent-child bonds, and spiritual communion.

Exclusivity: a structured prioritization of one person above others in certain domains (sexual union, shared household, primary loyalty). Exclusivity is morally meaningful in marriage because it protects fidelity and stabilizes obligations in a world of scarcity and temptation.

Communion: a form of shared life that can include mutual indwelling, common worship, unity without collapse, and love without rivalry. In Christian theology, communion names the deepest kind of participation: with God and among the people of God.

These distinctions allow us to ask the central question in a non-confused way: if marriage as institution ends, which of the goods listed above end with it, and which are preserved in a transformed mode? If we do not distinguish marriage from intimacy, and exclusivity from love, the discussion will swing between extremes: either "heaven is sterile" or "heaven continues earthly romance." The paper seeks a third way: to honor the goodness of marital love without requiring the eternalization of its scarcity-driven institutional form.

1.4 Method constraints: Scripture-first claims, pastoral realism, and disciplined inferences

This paper is intentionally constrained. It does not treat theology as an exercise in emotional reassurance. It treats theology as an attempt to speak truthfully about God in a way that can bear the weight of grief. To do that, the method must be clear.

Scripture-first claims: the paper begins with what the texts actually say and avoids building the conclusion by importing external metaphysics. The goal is not to dismiss tradition, but to prevent the argument from depending on claims the reader cannot verify from primary sources. Where tradition is helpful, it will be named as interpretive assistance, not as the foundation.

Pastoral realism: the paper refuses to solve the problem by scolding the questioner for loving too much. Deep attachment is not the enemy; it is part of what makes us human. A pastoral approach honors grief as evidence of love's goodness. It also takes seriously the lived reality that many people have been spiritually harmed by shallow assurances and by manipulative uses of intimacy language.

Disciplined inferences: Scripture is not a technical manual for the afterlife. It offers strong statements, images, and promises, but it leaves many details unspecified. Therefore, the paper distinguishes between three levels of claim: what is explicit, what is strongly implied, and what is speculative. When the paper makes an inference, it will do so under constraints: it must not contradict explicit teaching, it must cohere with the larger biblical narrative of creation and new creation, and it must be pastorally usable without creating fantasy.

A final constraint is moral seriousness: any proposed resolution must be evaluated not only for coherence but for its ability to tell the truth about God's goodness without turning grief into a spiritual failure. If the resolution requires saying "you won't care," it fails. If it requires denying the text, it fails. The only acceptable path is one that can say, with integrity, that marriage is a real created good, that death is a real wound, and that resurrection must be real repair—repair that does not trivialize what love meant here, even if the final form of love is larger than the institution that carried it.

This framing sets up the next sections. We will examine what exactly is denied by "no marriage," what marriage is doing under conditions of mortality and sin, and what kind of fulfilled communion could preserve the goodness of eros without simply continuing the marital form. The question is not whether God values love. The question is whether God's redemption is worthy of the loves God himself placed at the center of human life.

2. The Crucial Premise: No Earthly Marriage Has Been Perfect

If the phrase “no marriage in the resurrection” feels like a moral scandal, one reason is that we unconsciously treat marriage as if it were already the highest form of love available. We speak as though marriage were the final court of appeal for human intimacy, as though the deepest belonging a person can have is spouse-to-spouse, and as though the goods of family life are the best goods reality can offer. In that frame, the end of marriage sounds like the end of the best thing.

But the Christian story does not begin by saying marriage is the best thing. It begins by saying marriage is good. That sounds like a small difference until you face the realities of time, sin, and death. Goodness, in Scripture, often means “rightly given, rightly ordered, fitting to the creature.” It does not mean “already completed, already purified, already immune to corruption.” The premise of this section is therefore not cynical but clarifying: no earthly marriage has been perfect. Even the most faithful marriages remain mixtures—real love braided with fear, tenderness braided with irritation, loyalty braided with self-protection, union braided with misunderstanding. The existence of this mixture does not refute marriage’s goodness. It reveals marriage’s condition: created good living under non-ideal constraints.

This premise matters because it changes the moral shape of the question. If marriage were perfect in this life, then ending it in the next would appear like an arbitrary demotion. But if marriage is good yet compromised—if it is simultaneously gift and medicine—then it becomes plausible that God might preserve the goods it carries while refusing to freeze its compromised form into eternity. The point is not to downgrade marriage. The point is to refuse to idolize it as the final category of intimacy.

2.1 The difference between created good and perfected good

The phrase “created good” names something basic: God’s gift is real, not illusory. Marriage is not a mere concession to lust, nor merely a social contract, nor merely a metaphor. It is a created good in the sense that it fits human nature as embodied, relational, and generative. It is a structure through which love becomes stable and responsible.

But “created good” is not the same as “perfected good.” A created good can be right and still be incomplete. Incompleteness is not a flaw when the creature is temporal. It is the normal condition of living in time: we become, we mature, we learn, we fail, we repair. The idea that only the perfected is “truly good” is not biblical; it is a kind of perfectionism that collapses goodness into finishedness. In the biblical imagination, goodness is often the beginning of a story rather than its end.

A perfected good is a good that has been fully integrated into its proper end without internal contradiction. It is goodness without mixed motives, without fear-driven distortions, without

rivalry and scarcity, without the need for defensive structures. In Christian terms, perfection is not mere intensity or efficiency. It is wholeness: the inner alignment of desire, will, and action with truth and love.

Marriage, as we know it, is created good lived in a world where perfection has not yet arrived. It is good in its design and vocation, yet it operates under constraints that prevent it from being the final form of love. One of the paper's guiding claims is that resurrection hope is not a rejection of created goods, but the transformation of created goods toward their perfected end. The question becomes: is marriage itself that final end, or is marriage a created good that gestures toward a perfected communion beyond itself?

2.2 Why "imperfect but precious" is not a contradiction

People often hear "imperfect" as an insult. But imperfection can also mean "not finished," "not purified," "not fully stabilized," "not protected from fracture." In that sense, imperfection is the ordinary condition of every love in time. Love does not enter the world as a finished sculpture; it enters as a living thing that must be tended.

In practice, this means that a marriage can be precious precisely because it is costly. A marriage is precious because it asks for:

- repeated acts of repair
- the refusal to be ruled by transient emotion
- the discipline of staying when leaving would be easier
- the slow formation of trust through ordinary faithfulness

The very features that make marriage meaningful are often features that would not be necessary in a world without sin, scarcity, and death. That is not a reason to despise marriage. It is a reason to see what marriage is doing. Marriage is not only celebrating love; it is stabilizing love under pressure.

A second reason "imperfect but precious" is coherent is that human loves are often most beautiful at their edges—where they resist collapse. The tenderness of a spouse sitting with another spouse through illness is not tender because illness is good. It is tender because love refuses to stop being love when circumstances become hostile. The moral beauty here is real, but it is tied to a broken condition. A perfected world might not contain illness, yet it must contain something at least as real as this love. Otherwise the story would not be redemption; it would be replacement.

This is one of the central intuitions of a theodicy of eros: if human love is precious even in its imperfection, then God's goodness must be capable of carrying that preciousness forward without needing the broken conditions that made it heroic.

So "imperfect but precious" is not a contradiction. It is the normal description of time-bound love: real, meaningful, and vulnerable.

2.3 Marriage as moral school: formation through conflict, forgiveness, patience, and sacrifice

To call marriage a moral school is not to romanticize hardship; it is to describe what marriage actually does to people. Marriage, more than most relationships, forces the self out into the open. It reveals not only what we love, but how we love: how we react when disappointed, how we seek control, how we use words as weapons, how we withdraw, how we demand, how we keep score, how we refuse vulnerability.

This is why marriage forms character. It brings the daily self into contact with another daily self. It does so not in the pleasant contexts where people are on their best behavior, but in the repeated friction of shared life: finances, fatigue, sickness, parenting, conflict with extended family, uncertainty, and ordinary irritation. The household is a mirror. It shows what we are.

In a faithful marriage, that mirror becomes a training ground for virtues that are central to Christian holiness:

Conflict: not the presence of conflict, but the handling of conflict. Love does not eliminate difference. It learns to live with difference without turning difference into contempt.

Forgiveness: not the denial of harm, but the refusal to freeze the other into their worst moment. Forgiveness becomes a repeated practice rather than a single event.

Patience: not passive tolerance, but the willingness to bear slowness—slowness in growth, slowness in change, slowness in understanding.

Sacrifice: not self-annihilation, but the choice to place the good of the beloved and the household above immediate self-gratification.

These virtues are not secondary. They are the anatomy of love in a fallen world. This is why marriage is not merely a private romance. It is a public vocation that shapes persons and, through them, shapes children, neighborhoods, and communities.

Yet this moral school function also reveals marriage's contingency. A moral school exists because people are not yet formed. The school is good because it forms. But a world in which formation is complete does not require the same schooling mechanism. The question becomes: when love is perfected, does it still need the same institutional constraints and exclusivity structures that were designed to stabilize love amid immaturity, fear, and death?

In other words, marriage's status as moral school is a clue. It suggests that marriage is both real good and provisional structure: real because it forms love, provisional because it exists under conditions that require formation through constraint.

2.4 Theodicy implication: God is not obligated to eternalize the compromised form

Now the key moral move. If no earthly marriage is perfect, then it follows that God is not morally obligated to preserve marriage in its present form forever. That statement can sound cold until you realize what it protects.

If God were obligated to eternalize marriage as we know it, then God would be obligated to eternalize the conditions that marriage compensates for:

- scarcity-driven exclusivity that guards against rivalry
- fear-driven permanence that guards against abandonment
- legal and social structures that guard against betrayal
- procreative and generational roles that presume death and succession
- the vulnerability economy that makes the household a defensive shelter

But resurrection hope is precisely the claim that these conditions are not final. Death ends. Fear ends. Scarcity ends. Sin's distortions are healed. If those conditions are not final, then the institutions designed around those conditions cannot be assumed final either.

This is why theodicy does not necessarily demand "marriage continues." Theodicy demands something more subtle and more morally serious: that the goods marriage carried are not trivialized, and that the loves formed in marriage are not treated as disposable. It demands that redemption be capable of preserving what was truly good while healing what was distorted and removing what was necessary only because the world was unsafe.

So the crucial theodicy implication is not "God ends marriage, therefore love ends." It is:

- God is not morally required to freeze a compromised structure into eternity
- God is morally required to fulfill the good that structure served
- therefore the right question is not "Will marriage continue?" but "Will nothing good be lost?"

This reframing also protects against a common pastoral mistake: using "no marriage" as a rhetorical weapon against attachment, as if grieving spouses were guilty of idolatry simply because they loved deeply. Deep love is not idolatry. Love becomes idolatry when it refuses God, not when it honors a gift. The grief of losing marital life is not evidence that marriage was

wrong; it is evidence that marriage mattered. A morally coherent hope must be able to say: what mattered was not a mirage.

This section establishes the premise that allows the paper to proceed without cruelty. The next step is to identify precisely what the institutional form of marriage is doing here and why Jesus' statement denies the institutional form without necessarily denying the reality of particular love, recognition, and communion. Only then can we propose a theodicy of eros that is neither sentimental nor harsh: a hope where love is central now and completed then, without requiring that the compromised form be eternalized.

3. What Exactly Is Ended: The Institutional Form Versus the Goods It Carries

If the phrase "no marriage in the resurrection" triggers moral alarm, one reason is that we treat "marriage" as a single, indivisible thing. But marriage is not one thing. It is a bundle: a public covenant, a household economy, an exclusive-priority obligation, an embodied union, and (often) a generative vocation oriented toward children and inheritance. Some of these elements are intrinsic to what marriage is; others are functions marriage performs under specific historical and biological conditions.

The argument of this section is simple: when the New Testament says marriage does not continue, it is most plausibly denying the institutional bundle as an operative structure in the age to come, not denying every good that marriage carried in this age. The key to avoiding cruelty and fantasy is to keep two categories distinct:

- the institution as a stabilizing structure under conditions of sin, scarcity, and mortality
- the goods the institution protected, trained, and carried

If we collapse these, we end up with two equally unhelpful extremes. On one side, sentimental continuationism insists the institution must continue because love must continue. On the other side, sterile abstraction implies that if the institution ends, the goods must end too. Both mistakes come from the same confusion.

This section therefore asks a more careful question: what is "marriage" doing here, socially and morally, that might not be needed in a redeemed world? And which goods that marriage carries are plausibly preserved, intensified, and liberated when the conditions that necessitated the institution are removed?

3.1 Contract, household, and public covenant: what “marriage” is socially and morally

Marriage is never merely an emotion, because emotions rise and fall. Marriage is a public form that binds persons over time. That binding has at least three layers.

Contract: In many societies marriage has legal form. Even when not fully legal, it carries contract-like features: recognized commitments, enforceable expectations, public acknowledgment of obligations. The contract layer does not exist because love is untrustworthy in principle; it exists because humans are fragile, tempted, and forgetful. The contract layer stabilizes the promise when emotion fluctuates.

Household: Marriage creates a household, not merely a romance. A household is a moral and economic unit: shared labor, shared resources, shared risk, shared care. It is a location where dependence is not accidental but planned. This is why marriage is connected to questions of property, inheritance, and duty. The household layer exists because embodied life requires ongoing care, coordination, and resilience.

Public covenant: Marriage is also covenantal in a moral sense. It makes a promise not only to the spouse but before God and community. Covenant is more than contract because it includes moral identity: “this is who I am and who we are” rather than “this is what I will do under these terms.” Covenant transforms love from a private experience into a public vocation.

These three layers explain why marriage matters beyond the couple. Marriage stabilizes the social ecology of love and responsibility. It makes certain kinds of vulnerability safer: pregnancy, illness, unemployment, aging, childrearing. It builds a predictable place for care to land.

But these layers also reveal why the institution might be non-final. Contract presumes risk and enforcement. Household presumes scarcity and dependency. Public covenant presumes community needs visible forms to coordinate trust. If resurrection life is genuinely beyond death and the fragilities tied to death, then it is plausible that the public institution that manages these fragilities is not needed in the same way. That is not an insult to marriage. It is an acknowledgement that institutions are tailored to conditions.

One crucial point: the claim “marriage ends” does not mean “commitment ends.” It means the specific public covenant form that organizes commitment into a protected household unit may not function as the defining structure of love in the age to come. Love may remain committed and stable, but its stability may no longer require the same institutional scaffolding.

3.2 The exclusive-priority structure: why “forsaking all others” exists here

One of the most morally distinctive features of marriage is exclusivity. Marriage is not merely love; it is love made exclusive in certain domains. The vows typically signal a reordering of

priorities: spouse above all other human attachments, with specific implications for sexuality, household, and loyalty.

This exclusivity is often treated as the essence of marriage, and therefore its loss is felt as the loss of love itself. But exclusivity is not identical to love. Exclusivity is a protective architecture for love under conditions that make love unstable.

Why does exclusivity exist here?

Scarcity: Time, attention, energy, money, and bodily capacity are limited. A household cannot be infinitely open without dissolving. Exclusive priority is a way of ensuring that the duties of care do not become abstract ideals that never land anywhere.

Vulnerability: Human bodies are vulnerable. Pregnancy, childbirth, aging, illness, and disability create dependence. Exclusivity creates a predictable caregiver bond and stabilizes the expectation that someone will remain when conditions become costly.

Desire and temptation: Sexual desire is powerful and easily disordered. Exclusive sexual fidelity is both protection and training. It protects the spouse from betrayal and protects the self from scattering.

Jealousy and rivalry: In a world where desire often becomes possessive and competitive, exclusivity prevents love from becoming a constant negotiation of anxiety and comparison. It creates a moral boundary that reduces relational chaos.

Lineage and inheritance: Exclusive unions historically organize family lines, kinship ties, and inheritance. Even when modern couples do not focus on these, the structure exists because generations exist and resources must be passed on.

These functions show why exclusivity is not an arbitrary limitation. It is a medicine for a fallen world. But medicine is not the same as the final form of health. In a world without death and without scarcity-driven rivalry, the need for exclusive priority may change. The moral question becomes: if exclusivity is largely a protection against scarcity and sin, what happens when scarcity and sin are overcome?

Here a critical distinction emerges: particularity versus possession. Exclusivity often gets confused with the idea that one person can be “mine” in a possessive sense, which easily slides into rivalry and control. A redeemed love may preserve particularity—unique history, unique gratitude, unique joy—while losing possessiveness and rivalry. The exclusive-priority structure could be a temporal way of protecting particularity in a world where particularity is otherwise threatened by disordered desire. In resurrection, the protection may no longer be needed if love is purified and scarcity is removed.

This is the key to avoiding the “flat communion” fear. The alternative to exclusivity is not interchangeability. It is love without rivalry.

3.3 Sexual union and procreation: functions that depend on mortality and generation

Marriage is historically and biblically entangled with two bodily realities: sexual union and procreation. Even in cultures where marriage is treated primarily as romance, these realities remain in the background because humans remain embodied creatures who reproduce and age.

Sexual union: In marriage, sexuality is not merely permitted; it is ordered. It is located within covenant to protect dignity, fidelity, and the stability of the household. Sexual union also has symbolic force: it is a bodily enactment of “one flesh,” a sign of mutual giving and belonging. But in fallen conditions, sexuality is also one of the most easily distorted aspects of human life: lust, exploitation, shame, coercion, and commodification. Marriage functions as a moral structure that disciplines sexuality toward fidelity and mutuality.

Procreation: Procreation is the mechanism by which a mortal species continues. It is, at root, a response to death: because people die, children are born. Because generations pass, inheritance, lineage, and the long-term continuity of society matter. Marriage functions as an institution that stabilizes the context in which children are conceived and raised, providing the household structure needed for vulnerable human offspring.

If resurrection life includes the end of death, then procreation as succession loses its necessity. A world without death does not require replenishment. This is not to say that children are bad or that generativity was a mistake. It is to say that procreation is a vocation tied to mortal history and generational time.

This creates a straightforward inference: if a major function of marriage is to stabilize sexual union and generativity in a mortal world, then a world without death may not require the same marriage institution to manage sexuality and childrearing. The form of embodied intimacy could be transformed in ways that do not map neatly onto our present sexual economy.

We should be careful here. Scripture does not offer a detailed biology of resurrection. It does not give a technical account of what bodily life is like beyond death. But it does constrain the direction of inference: resurrection life is embodied, not disembodied; perfected, not merely prolonged; communal, not isolated; healed, not merely reset. Under those constraints, it becomes plausible that the functions marriage serves with respect to sexuality and procreation are bound to mortality and generation, and therefore not final.

What this does not mean: it does not mean desire is annihilated. It does not mean delight disappears. It does not mean intimacy becomes sterile. It means the specific set of roles and

functions that marriage fulfills in a mortal, generational world is not assumed to persist unchanged when mortality and generational succession are overcome.

3.4 Clarifying the claim: ending the institution is not ending love, recognition, or particular history

Now we can state the clarification that protects the paper from both harshness and fantasy.

When Scripture says marriage does not continue, it is most naturally interpreted as the ending of marriage as an institutional and vocational structure: no new contracting of households, no social distribution of persons into exclusive marital units, no marriage-based organization of generational continuity. It is the end of marriage as a governance form for embodied love in mortal history.

But ending the institution is not the same as ending the goods that were carried within it:

Love: Love is not reducible to an institution. It is possible for love to persist and deepen even when the institutional form that stabilized it is no longer needed. The ultimate question is whether love persists as particular, faithful, and joyful without needing scarcity-driven exclusivity.

Recognition: One of the deepest fears behind the "no marriage" claim is the fear of being unrecognized, or of becoming interchangeable. But recognition is a different category than marital status. Recognition is about personhood: being known as oneself, with one's history intact. Scripture's resurrection hope leans toward continuity of identity, not erasure. Even if the institution ends, recognition can remain.

Particular history: A marriage is a shared story. The story is not nullified if the institution ends. Shared history can become a permanent source of gratitude and delight rather than a lost possession. The fear is that "if we are not married, then what we were together is undone." The better hope is that what was true remains true, but without the vulnerabilities that made it fragile.

This is why the argument must avoid the cheap consolation "you won't care." That phrase solves the problem by proposing amnesia or indifference. It implies that heaven repairs grief by reducing capacity for attachment. That is theologically and morally suspect, because it makes salvation a kind of lobotomy of the heart. A coherent theodicy of eros must instead show how love's goods can be preserved without insisting that the institutional form continues.

The core proposal that begins to emerge here is this: marriage is a real created good that functions as covenantal protection and moral schooling under conditions of mortality and sin. In resurrection, the protective and scarcity-driven features of the institution may no longer be required. What must be preserved is not the administrative distribution of persons into marital

units, but the reality the institution protected: faithful love, mutual knowledge, shared joy, and communion without fear.

With this clarification in place, we can proceed to the next step: the scriptural pressure points that force the issue and constrain our inferences. We can then ask whether the "fulfillment model" can meet theodicy's moral demands: not to eternalize the compromised structure, yet to lose nothing truly good.

4. Scriptural Pressure Points: The Saying and Its Interpretive Boundaries

If theodicy of eros is to be more than mood-management, it must pass through a narrow gate: the explicit words of Jesus. The difficulty is not that Scripture is silent; the difficulty is that Scripture speaks clearly at one point and leaves many adjacent questions under-specified. That combination—one sharp denial surrounded by open space—is exactly what generates both anxiety and speculative excess. People either deny the sharp statement to protect their loves, or they fill the open space with harsh conclusions that Scripture never required.

This section therefore does two things. First, it names what the saying actually denies. Second, it names what it does not deny, and why responsible interpretation must remain disciplined at that boundary. The purpose is not to reduce mystery, but to prevent the moral and pastoral damage caused by careless inference. Theodicy requires moral honesty, and moral honesty begins with textual honesty.

4.1 What is explicitly denied: marrying and being given in marriage

The explicit denial is institutional and vocational. The language is not "there will be no love" or "there will be no intimacy." The language is about the act of entering marriage and the social process of being placed into marriage. In the ancient world this "being given" language names marriage as a public institution, not merely a private romance. It points to marriage as a structured arrangement within the community, involving families, households, and public recognition.

This matters because it clarifies the target. What is denied is the continuance of marriage as an operative social practice in the resurrection age: no new marriages are made, and the community does not distribute persons into marital units. That is the clean textual claim.

The denial also implies that marriage is not the final organizing principle of resurrected human society. If marriage were final, the resurrection would be the moment to perfect it, not eliminate the act of entering it. The saying therefore functions like a boundary marker: it limits the range of permissible eschatological imagination. One cannot simply assume that heaven is a continuation of earthly social ordering with upgrades.

At the same time, the saying does not explain why. Jesus gives a denial, not a full metaphysical lecture. That is one reason theodicy pressure arises: the text imposes a limit without satisfying the emotional demand for explanation. This is where interpretation must proceed with care rather than with panic.

4.2 What is not stated: annihilation of desire, loss of personhood, loss of mutual knowledge

The most common mistake is to hear "no marriage" and infer "no eros," "no desire," "no intimacy," "no special love," or even "no personal identity." None of that is stated. The text draws a boundary around marriage as an institution; it does not map the entire landscape of resurrected affect, relationality, or embodied experience.

Three non-stated conclusions are especially important to refuse.

Annihilation of desire: The text does not say desire is removed. It does not say the human heart becomes passionless or that delight is extinguished. It does not even say sexuality, in the broad sense of embodied differentiation and embodied life, is erased. Those are inferences people import, often because they assume that if marriage ends, the energies tied to marriage must be turned off. But the text does not say "turned off." It says "not married." That is a different category.

Loss of personhood: The text does not imply that individuals are absorbed into an undifferentiated unity. It does not say that personal identity is dissolved or that relationships become generic. The fear of "interchangeability" often drives people toward continuationism: "If I'm not married to my spouse, then my spouse and I become strangers." But the text does not say "strangers." It says "no marriage." Personhood and institutional status are not the same.

Loss of mutual knowledge: The text does not say we will not recognize one another or know one another. People often worry: "If the marriage bond does not continue, does the shared history become meaningless?" The saying does not address recognition or memory. It limits a social institution, not the possibility of deep mutual knowing.

These non-stated items matter because the moral scandal often arises from mistakenly treating them as stated. The harshest versions of "no marriage" preaching tend to smuggle in a severe anthropology: heaven as emotional flattening, attachment as immaturity, grief as proof of idolatry. But none of that follows from the text. Those conclusions are not biblical necessities; they are interpretive choices—often driven by discomfort with eros or fear of pastoral complexity.

A disciplined theodicy of eros must therefore keep its claims proportionate. It must not demand that the grieving accept additional losses that Scripture did not require. And it must not protect people with unauthorized assurances. Discipline cuts both ways.

4.3 “Like angels” as a vocation marker: immortality and non-succession, not disembodiment

The phrase “like angels” is often where people go wrong. They treat it as if Jesus said “you will become angels,” or “you will become non-bodily,” or “you will become sexless spirits.” But the comparison is narrower. The point is a likeness in a specific respect relevant to the question: the conditions of resurrected life are not governed by death, and therefore not governed by the succession logic that makes marriage socially necessary in its current form.

Angels in biblical imagination are not mortal creatures who reproduce to continue a lineage. They do not die and do not maintain a generational chain. In that sense they represent a mode of creaturely life in which procreative succession is not the organizing principle. The likeness, then, is about mortality and vocation, not about disembodiment.

That interpretation also fits the larger shape of Christian hope: resurrection is not escape from the body but renewal of embodied life. The new life is not “less physical” but “more whole.” Therefore “like angels” is best read as a boundary against assuming that resurrected society runs on the same biological and generational necessities that define history now.

This helps with the moral pressure point: if marriage is partly an institution for stabilizing generational life under death, then “no marriage” can be understood as “no marriage-as-succession-governance.” That does not answer every question about eros, but it makes the denial morally legible. It shows why the institutional structure might be unnecessary without implying that intimacy is abolished.

Importantly, the phrase also warns against a different error: imagining the resurrection as merely an extension of present life indefinitely, with the same scarcity economics. “Like angels” signals a categorical shift in the conditions of creaturely existence. Theodicy must take that shift seriously. If death ends, some structures that were designed around death will change.

4.4 Why this creates moral pressure: if marriage is central now, why is it not final?

Even after these clarifications, the moral pressure remains, because it is not primarily a textual confusion. It is an anthropological and moral intuition: marriage feels central to what it means to be human. It is where people learn belonging, sacrifice, fidelity, forgiveness, and generativity. So if it is central now, why is it not final?

The pressure has at least four layers.

First, the continuity problem: If salvation restores creation, why would it remove a central creation good? This feels like discontinuity: the next life becomes a different kind of life, and the person who loved deeply here feels as though their loves are being treated as training wheels that will be discarded.

Second, the justice problem: Death already wrongs love by separation. If the marital bond is not restored as marriage, the grieving fear that the wrong is not fully righted. The loss begins to look permanent in a new way: not permanent separation from the beloved, but permanent loss of the form in which love was lived.

Third, the identity problem: Many people's identity and moral story are braided into marriage and family. They do not only love their spouse; they became someone through that love. If the institution ends, does the self that was forged in it still make sense? This is why "you won't care" is such a destructive answer. It implies that the self formed through love is not worth preserving.

Fourth, the goodness-of-God problem: If God designed humans so that the deepest, most shaping love is marital and familial, then the end of marriage can feel like God built meaning on a structure that is not honored in the end. That is theodicy in its most intimate form: can God be trusted with love's architecture?

These pressures do not disappear by repeating the text. They require a moral account of why a good God could end an institution that is central now without trivializing the goods it carried. This is exactly why the earlier premise matters: no earthly marriage is perfect, and much of what marriage does is protective under scarcity and death. The interpretive task is to show that the central goods are preserved and intensified even if the institutional scaffolding changes.

At this stage, we have established the interpretive boundaries:

- Scripture explicitly denies marriage as an institutional act and social distribution in the resurrection age.
- Scripture does not explicitly deny desire, personhood, recognition, or particular love.
- "Like angels" indicates a shift in mortality and succession conditions, not a slide into disembodiment.
- The moral pressure arises because marriage is central now, and any account of God's goodness must explain how central goods can be fulfilled without being trivialized.

The next step, then, is to locate marriage within a larger map of creation, fall, and redemption, and to ask what marriage is doing as "medicine" under broken conditions. Only then can a theodicy of eros move from boundary-setting to constructive hope: not a hope of mere continuation, but a hope of fulfillment in which nothing truly good is lost.

5. A Creation-Fall-Redemption Map of Eros

The moral scandal of "no marriage in the resurrection" becomes less opaque when eros is placed inside the full Christian story rather than treated as an isolated human appetite. Eros is not a late-stage temptation glued onto spirituality. It is one of the basic energies of creaturely life: the impulse toward union, the hunger for communion, the longing to be known and to know, the desire to give and receive delight, the drive to generate life and to build a home.

If eros is understood only as sexual craving, then Christianity seems like it must either repress eros or spiritualize away from it. But if eros is understood as a created orientation toward communion, then Christianity can speak more truthfully: eros is good in its created aim, yet vulnerable to corruption; marriage is good as a stabilizing form of eros under fallen conditions; redemption is not the abolition of eros but its purification and fulfillment. This map clarifies why marriage can be central now without being final. It is central because it holds a powerful created energy in a faithful form within a broken world. It is not final because the broken-world conditions that require such holding are not final.

The map also clarifies why theodicy belongs here. Theodicy is not only about pain; it is about the destiny of goods. If eros is a created good, then a good God must redeem it rather than mock it. The question becomes: what does redeemed eros look like when the conditions that deform eros have been removed?

5.1 Eros as created orientation: desire as an arrow toward communion and life

Eros begins as orientation. Before it is temptation, before it is shame, before it is rivalry, it is the creature's pull toward communion. It is the recognition that isolation is not the intended state, that life is meant to be shared, that the self is not complete as a sealed unit. In this sense eros is not merely "wanting." It is the soul's gravity toward union.

This is why eros is not reducible to sex. Sexuality is one expression of eros, but eros includes the whole field of desiring love: attraction, admiration, longing, tenderness, delight, and the willingness to bind oneself to another's good. Eros is the energy by which the human heart reaches beyond itself. It is the engine of intimacy and the seed of generativity.

Under creation, eros functions as an arrow toward communion and life in at least four ways.

First, eros aims at personal union. It draws persons into mutual knowing and mutual giving. It is not just "I want you"; at its best it becomes "I want your good, and I want to be with you in a way that creates a shared life."

Second, eros aims at embodied fidelity. Human beings do not love as disembodied minds. We love through touch, presence, shared work, and shared time. Eros therefore has a bodily truth: it seeks union that is not only conceptual but lived.

Third, eros aims at home. The desire for union naturally becomes a desire for stability and shared habitat: a place where life can be coordinated, where vulnerability is sheltered, where daily existence is not a solitary burden.

Fourth, eros aims at life beyond the self. In many cases it aims at generativity: children, legacy, continuation, and the expansion of love into family. Even when couples do not have children, eros still often seeks generativity in broader forms: building, nurturing, creating, serving.

In short, eros is the created energy that moves human beings toward communion, home, and life. This is why it is so central to meaning. It is also why it becomes so dangerous when corrupted: a powerful arrow, when bent, becomes a weapon.

5.2 The Fall as corruption of intimacy: shame, domination, concealment, rivalry, fear

The Fall does not introduce embodiment. It does not introduce differentiation. It does not create the capacity for desire. What it introduces is a fracture inside desire and inside relationship. It turns an arrow toward communion into an arrow that can be turned inward toward possession, control, and self-protection.

The corruption of intimacy has several recognizable signatures.

Shame: The most immediate shift is that nakedness becomes psychologically unbearable. This is not just about bodies; it is about exposure. Shame makes being seen feel dangerous. When shame enters, the human heart learns to hide. Intimacy is no longer “safe exposure” but “risk of humiliation.”

Domination: Power enters love. The relationship becomes vulnerable to control: using the other, managing the other, manipulating the other. Love turns from mutual giving into a contest of leverage. Even when domination is subtle, it can be real: emotional coercion, withdrawal as punishment, the use of obligation to extract compliance.

Concealment: The self splits into persona and interior. People begin to manage their image in relation to the beloved. They hide weakness, desire, resentment, temptation, fear. Concealment makes intimacy less truthful. It introduces performance into love.

Rivalry: Desire becomes competitive. Where eros aimed at communion, it now can aim at superiority: being preferred, being chosen, being validated. Rivalry poisons relationships because it makes love into a ranking system. Jealousy becomes both symptom and accelerant.

Fear: The deepest corruption is fear. Fear of abandonment, fear of betrayal, fear of being known too deeply, fear of not being enough, fear of being trapped, fear of losing autonomy. Fear bends eros toward grasping, and grasping bends eros toward possession.

These corruptions are not side effects. They are the new atmosphere in which eros must operate. In that atmosphere, love becomes precarious. Desire becomes ambiguous. Intimacy becomes both hunger and threat. This is why marriage, in a fallen world, cannot simply be a celebration of eros. It must become a structure that restrains, stabilizes, and rehabilitates eros.

This also clarifies why it is morally naive to treat marriage as if it were already the final form of love. Marriage in a fallen world is beautiful, but it is also heavy. It carries burdens it was not designed to carry in Eden. It functions not only as union but as repair.

5.3 Marriage as medicine: covenant as protection where trust is fragile

If the Fall corrupts intimacy, then marriage becomes medicine. Not because eros is evil, but because eros is now exposed to distortions that can destroy persons and households. Marriage, as covenant, is a moral technology for protecting love under conditions of fear, rivalry, and vulnerability.

The medicine has multiple components.

Public covenant: By making love public, marriage removes some of love's volatility. The couple is no longer guided only by mood or private desire; they are bound by a shared promise witnessed by community and, in Christian understanding, by God. This creates accountability. It gives love a spine.

Exclusive fidelity: Exclusivity is not merely restrictive; it is protective. It reduces the relational chaos that comes from scattered desire. It provides a clear boundary that guards the spouse from betrayal and guards the couple from endless negotiation with temptation and jealousy. It is medicine against rivalry.

Household stability: Marriage creates a stable unit for care. In a world of sickness, poverty, aging, and child dependency, stability is not optional. The household structure channels love into daily acts: meals, finances, maintenance, protection, and the boring fidelity of showing up.

Role clarity: Even imperfect role structures can reduce conflict by clarifying expectations. In healthy form, roles are mutual and flexible; in unhealthy form, they become domination. The point is not to defend every historical role pattern, but to note that marriage, as institution, tries to stabilize the vulnerabilities of shared life by making responsibilities explicit.

Forgiveness and repair: Marriage becomes the primary context in which forgiveness is not occasional but continuous. The covenant creates space for repair, because the relationship is not discarded at each failure. This is medicine for the brokenness of daily life.

Calling marriage medicine does not demean it. Medicine is a good. It saves. But medicine is designed for an illness condition. If you imagine a world where the illness is gone, you do not

accuse the physician of cruelty for not prescribing antibiotics forever. You ask what health looks like without the conditions that required the prescription.

This is the structural logic behind the claim that marriage can be central now but not final. Marriage is central because it is one of the primary ways God shelters and trains eros under fallen conditions. It may not be final because the fallen conditions it treats are not final.

This is also why the "double loss" experience is so acute. In this life, marriage is not only delight; it is shelter. When a spouse dies, it is not only affection that is lost; it is the shelter, the shared home of care. If the next life does not reinstate marriage as shelter, people fear that the shelter itself was temporary. Theodicy demands a better answer: that the sheltering goods are not abolished but exceeded.

5.4 Redemption as healing: not erasing desire but cleansing it of fear and possession

Redemption must be more than moral instruction. If it is merely "try harder," it cannot address the deep corruption of eros described above. Redemption must heal desire at its roots: the inner disorders that turn longing into grasping and communion into control.

The central claim here is that redemption does not erase eros. It heals eros. It cleanses eros of fear and possession and restores it to its created orientation toward truthful communion.

What does that healing involve?

Purification from fear: Fear is the hidden engine of much relational disorder. Fear of abandonment produces clinging. Fear of exposure produces hiding. Fear of loss produces control. Redemption must address fear not by numbing emotion, but by establishing security at the deepest level: a grounded belonging that does not depend on perfect circumstances. In Christian terms, this security is anchored in God's faithful presence, which stabilizes the heart so that human love does not have to carry the weight of being ultimate.

Purification from possession: Possession is the corruption of "mine." It turns beloved into property. It treats exclusivity as ownership rather than as vowed care. Redemption reorders "mine" into stewardship: the beloved is entrusted, not possessed. This change does not reduce intimacy; it makes intimacy safer and more truthful.

Purification from rivalry: Rivalry is what turns love into competition. Redemption aims at love that can rejoice in others' good without threat. In the age to come, love must be non-competitive, or else heaven would be merely a rearrangement of hellish dynamics.

Purification from concealment: Love cannot be perfected while hiding remains necessary. The healed state implies a form of mutual transparency without shame: being known without

humiliation, being seen without danger. This does not mean exposure without boundaries; it means the end of the need to perform.

Purification from domination: The redeemed form of eros must be non-coercive. It must be love that does not need leverage. If domination persists, then love remains fallen.

Notice what this implies for marriage. If marriage's institutional features are medicines for fear, rivalry, and vulnerability, then a redeemed world in which fear and rivalry are healed may no longer require the same medicine. The goods remain—communion, delight, mutual knowledge, belonging, shared joy, shared life—but the scaffolding tailored to broken conditions can be set aside because the conditions have changed.

This is the bridge to the later argument: the end of marriage as institution need not mean the end of eros as desire for union. It can mean the completion of eros into a form of communion where exclusivity is no longer needed to protect love, because love no longer competes, grasps, hides, or controls. Theodicy is satisfied not by "you won't care," but by "your love will be healed into something you cannot yet imagine without fear."

At this point in the paper, the map is in place:

- Eros is created as an arrow toward communion and life.
- The Fall corrupts intimacy through shame, domination, concealment, rivalry, and fear.
- Marriage becomes medicine: covenantal shelter and moral schooling where trust is fragile.
- Redemption heals eros: cleansing desire of fear and possession rather than erasing desire.

The next step is to turn this map into explicit theodicy criteria: what must be true of the final state if God is good, and what would count as betrayal of the created goods that shaped human life.

6. Theodicy Criteria: What Would a Good God Do With Marriage and Family?

Theodicy is often discussed as a philosophical defense, but here it functions as a moral audit. The question is not, "Can we construct a logically possible world in which God and suffering coexist?" The question is more intimate and more demanding: "Can God be trusted with the deepest goods God placed at the center of human life?" Marriage and family are not abstract goods. They are where most people learned what love is, what sacrifice costs, what forgiveness

requires, and what it means to belong. If Christian eschatology treats these goods as disposable or merely instructional, it risks presenting God as morally unintelligible.

This section proposes four criteria that any coherent "theodicy of eros" must satisfy. They are not proofs. They are constraints. They function like guardrails for theology: if an account of heaven violates these criteria, it may still be imaginative, but it becomes pastorally destructive and morally suspect.

The criteria are designed to hold together two commitments that easily separate: fidelity to Scripture's explicit claim that marriage as institution does not continue, and fidelity to the moral intuition that God's goodness must not negate the goods through which God formed us. The goal is a posture of "reverence plus audit" applied to eros: reverence toward God's promises, audit toward our own interpretive evasions.

6.1 The no-trivialization principle: redemption must honor the goods that made life meaningful

The first criterion is the most basic: if marriage and family were real created goods, then redemption must not treat them as if they were mere props.

No-trivialization means at least three things.

First, marriage cannot be reduced to a metaphor that never mattered in itself. Many believers have been told, implicitly or explicitly, that marriage is only a "sign" and therefore not deeply real. But signs can be deeply real. Bread in a meal is real bread even if it also signifies fellowship. A marriage can be a sign and also be one of the most substantial realities of a human life. If redemption speaks as if the sign had no intrinsic value, it insults the lived moral weight of love.

Second, family cannot be treated as spiritually irrelevant. Christian language about "the family of God" is not permission to dismiss actual families as trivial. If we do that, we sever theology from the way God actually formed most persons: in households, through parents, spouses, and children, through daily care and conflict. No-trivialization insists that God's redemption respects the pathways through which God's providence and moral formation operated in time.

Third, grief cannot be framed as immaturity. If marriage and family are real goods, then grief over losing them is not necessarily idolatry; it is often testimony to the goodness of what was lost. A theology that shames grief by calling it "attachment to earthly things" violates the moral seriousness of love. Redemption must be able to honor grief without turning grief into spiritual failure.

No-trivialization therefore sets the baseline: any account of "no marriage" that functions by belittling marriage is automatically disqualified. It might be tidy, but it is morally thin.

6.2 The no-setup principle: God must not “teach love” by merely taking love away

The second criterion confronts a common suspicion: that the world is designed like a lesson plan in which God gives us love only to remove it and then tells us to call the removal “wisdom.” This is the “setup” fear: God as educator by deprivation.

No-setup does not mean there is no suffering or that suffering cannot form us. It means that formation must not be achieved by making the goods themselves appear pointless or deceptive. If God uses marriage and family to teach love, then God must also vindicate the goodness of marriage and family, not merely use them as bait.

This principle includes an important distinction: loss can be permitted without being the meaning of the good. A person can learn patience through illness, but illness is not thereby made good. Likewise, a person can learn virtue through marital suffering, but the suffering is not the meaning of marriage. The meaning of marriage is communion, fidelity, and the creation of a home for love. When theology implies that the real point of marriage was to teach us not to need marriage, it slides into the setup logic.

No-setup also guards against a covert theology of contempt for the creature. If the highest loves of embodied life are ultimately treated as things we must outgrow, then human nature begins to look like a trap to be transcended rather than a gift to be redeemed. That is not resurrection. That is escape.

Therefore no-setup demands that the final state must be able to say, without irony: the loves you lived were not childish rehearsals to be discarded; they were real participation in real goodness. If the institutional form changes, the goods must be carried forward in a more stable and healed way. Otherwise God’s pedagogy would appear like mockery.

6.3 The no-scarcity-forever principle: final love cannot depend on rivalry and loss

The third criterion is perhaps the deepest. It concerns the structure of love under scarcity.

Many of the most emotionally intense features of romantic love are intensified by scarcity: “I could lose you,” “time is short,” “we must cling,” “this is ours against the world.” Mortality and fragility give love a tragic edge that feels like meaning. But this meaning is bound to a broken condition.

If the resurrection is genuinely beyond death, then final love cannot be constituted by the same scarcity economy that governs love now. Otherwise heaven would remain haunted by the same threats: rivalry, jealousy, anxious possession, and the fear of loss. A love that depends on scarcity remains structurally vulnerable. It remains fear-activated. It cannot be the final form.

No-scarcity-forever implies that the final state must include at least two transformations.

First, the end of rivalry. If the blessed life is a life of communion, it cannot be organized by competitive desire. Love cannot be "me and mine" in opposition to "you and yours" as a fundamental structure, because that structure presumes threat. If threat remains, redemption has failed.

Second, the end of loss as a constitutive ingredient. Loss may be remembered, and healed, and redeemed in narrative. But loss cannot be the engine of meaning in the final state. The final state must not require death to make love precious. Love must be precious without the threat of disappearance.

This criterion helps explain why marriage-as-exclusive-priority may not be final. Exclusive-priority structures often function to manage scarcity and threat: limited time, limited attention, limited trust, limited safety. If those scarcity conditions are removed, the reason for organizing love by that structure may be removed as well. The goods remain, but the scarcity-driven architecture is not eternally required.

No-scarcity-forever therefore becomes a crucial theodicy constraint: a good God will not perpetuate scarcity as the condition for love's intensity. God's goodness must make love deep without making love fragile.

6.4 The no-sentimentality principle: hope must speak to grief without fantasy or cruelty

The fourth criterion addresses a pastoral temptation: to resolve the scandal by giving people whatever picture feels comforting, regardless of what can be responsibly claimed. But sentimentality is not kindness. Sentimentality is hope without truth. It often feels merciful in the moment, but it becomes cruel later when reality intrudes.

No-sentimentality requires two refusals.

The refusal of fantasy: We cannot promise what Scripture does not promise. If the text denies marriage as an institution, then saying "you will be married forever" is not pastoral; it is a lie that postpones grief and then multiplies confusion. Fantasy-based comfort treats the believer like a child who must be calmed rather than an adult who can bear truth.

The refusal of cruelty: We cannot comfort by erasing love. The phrase "you won't care then" is cruelty disguised as theology. It proposes salvation by indifference. It implies that the remedy for grief is diminished attachment rather than redeemed attachment. It makes heaven into emotional flattening rather than perfected communion.

No-sentimentality therefore insists that hope must be simultaneously truthful and tender. It must be truthful about what is denied and not overpromise. It must be tender in that it refuses to shame grief or to call deep love a spiritual defect. It must honor the mourning heart as morally serious.

This criterion also forces theological discipline about what we can and cannot infer. Scripture provides strong promises of joy, healing, communion, and the defeat of death, but it does not provide a detailed social blueprint. Therefore the responsible posture is restrained confidence: confidence in what is promised, restraint about the specific mechanics. A theodicy of eros must be built from that posture: it must comfort with what is truly promised rather than with speculative romance, while also refusing the reduction of hope to sterile abstraction.

Taken together, these four criteria form the moral shape of the paper's argument:

- Redemption must honor marriage and family as real goods that made life meaningful.
- God must not be portrayed as teaching love by giving and then merely removing the good.
- Final love must not depend on scarcity, rivalry, and the threat of loss.
- Hope must be truthful and tender, avoiding both fantasy and cruelty.

These criteria set the stage for evaluating competing models. If a model solves the "no marriage" problem by trivializing marriage, it fails. If it solves it by denying Scripture, it fails. If it solves it by turning heaven into emotional indifference, it fails. The only acceptable model will be one that can plausibly preserve the goods of eros and family while transfiguring them beyond scarcity-driven structures. That is the next task: to compare and refine abolition and fulfillment, and to test which one can pass the theodicy audit without breaking the text or breaking hearts.

7. Two Models Reworked: Abolition Versus Fulfillment Under Imperfection

At this point the argument reaches a fork. The text denies marriage as an institution in the resurrection age. The heart insists that marriage and family were among the most meaningful goods of embodied human life. Theodicy adds constraints: redemption must not trivialize these goods, must not run on "setup" logic, must not perpetuate scarcity-based love, and must not comfort by fantasy or cruelty. Under these constraints, two broad interpretive models emerge. They are not merely academic options; they shape pastoral counsel, grief practice, and the moral picture of God.

The first model treats marriage as a temporary scaffold: it served a purpose in history and then is set aside with limited continuity of its distinctive goods. The second model treats marriage as a real created good whose protective and scarcity-driven features become unnecessary when the conditions they address are healed. Both models can claim to respect the explicit denial of marriage. The difference is what they do with eros and with particular love.

The key move in this paper is to refine both models under the premise of imperfection. Because no earthly marriage is perfect, "fulfillment" cannot mean "simply continue marriage forever." And because marriage is a real good, "abolition" cannot mean "marriage was basically a mistake." Under imperfection, each model must be adjusted. Only one will remain morally and pastorally stable.

7.1 Abolition model refined: marriage as temporary scaffold with minimal continuity

The abolition model begins with a simple thesis: marriage is not final. It is a time-bound institution for a time-bound world. Therefore when the resurrection comes, the institution ends, and the distinctive pattern of spousal exclusivity and household bonding does not carry over as a special, preserved relationship structure.

In refined form, abolition does not necessarily say marriage is bad. It says marriage is provisional. It performed needed functions under mortality and sin, but those functions are no longer needed. Love in the age to come is "greater" in a general sense—more universal, more God-centered, more communal—and therefore does not require or preserve spousal particularity as a defining structure.

Abolition typically emphasizes at least four themes.

First, replacement by a higher good. Marriage is a sign pointing toward God's union with the redeemed community. When the reality arrives, the sign is no longer needed. The good is not annihilated; it is surpassed.

Second, universal communion. Instead of exclusive bonds, there is full fellowship. Love is not narrowed into spousal priority but expanded into communal belonging.

Third, de-centering of eros. Desire in its romantic sense is treated as non-final, possibly transmuted into spiritual joy. The emphasis is that God becomes the direct object of longing.

Fourth, minimal continuity claims. The abolition model is cautious about saying that spousal bonds remain uniquely special, because it fears creating a contradiction with the end of marriage. It often implies that earthly roles and relational statuses are not determinative in the next life.

This model has strengths. It takes the textual denial seriously. It protects against sentimental continuationism and against eroticizing heaven. It also highlights a genuinely Christian point: God is not merely an enhancer of earthly goods; God is the final good.

But under theodicy constraints, abolition faces a danger: it can too easily slide into trivialization or setup logic. If the distinctive goods of marital love are not in some sense carried forward, then the grieving spouse may hear: "Your love was meaningful only as practice. The relationship

itself is not preserved in any special way." Even if the abolition model does not intend cruelty, it can land as cruelty because it is vague at precisely the place grief is most concrete.

The abolition model also risks a subtle moral downgrade of created goods: if the final state is good partly because it excludes or dissolves the particularity of marital bonds, then the logic begins to suggest that particularity itself was a lower, immature mode. That can make human love feel like a ladder to be kicked away once climbed. Some will accept this. Many will feel it as betrayal.

Therefore, refined abolition is workable only if it can affirm robust continuity of personal identity, recognition, and truthful love while still denying the institutional and exclusive-priority structure. If abolition becomes "you won't care," it fails the theodicy audit. If it becomes "you will care, but in a form that is not married," it starts moving toward fulfillment anyway.

7.2 Fulfillment model refined: marriage as real good whose protective features become unnecessary

The fulfillment model begins with a different thesis: marriage is not only a scaffold; it is a real created good that participates in the shape of love God intends. Marriage is therefore not merely a temporary coping mechanism. It is a genuine place where persons become capable of faithful love. Its goods are not disposable. However, because marriage exists under conditions of death and sin, its institutional form includes protective features tailored to those conditions. When death and sin are overcome, those protective features are no longer necessary, even though the goods they protected remain.

In refined form, fulfillment makes a critical distinction:

- marriage-as-institution ends
- marital-goods are preserved, purified, and enlarged

Fulfillment emphasizes at least four themes.

First, continuity of goodness. What is truly good in marriage—fidelity, mutual delight, shared life, deep knowing, covenantal steadiness—must not be treated as a mere prop. Redemption fulfills goods rather than negating them.

Second, purification of eros. Eros is not erased. It is healed: freed from fear, domination, rivalry, and possession. Love becomes more truthful, less anxious, less competitive.

Third, transformation of structure. The institutional bundle—contracting marriage, arranging households, assigning exclusive-priority obligations tied to mortality and generational succession—ceases to be necessary because the conditions that demanded it have changed.

Fourth, enlargement into communion. Fulfillment does not shrink love to the couple. It expands love beyond the couple without flattening the couple's history. The final state is not "less relational," but "more relational," with no rivalry.

This model has immediate pastoral appeal because it can say to the grieving: "Your love was real. Its goodness will not be mocked. Nothing truly good will be lost." It also aligns with a creation-new creation continuity intuition: redemption restores and completes rather than discards.

But fulfillment too has a danger. If it is stated lazily, it becomes sentimental continuationism: "we'll just keep being married forever." That ignores the text. So fulfillment must be refined under imperfection: it cannot be a promise of the institution's continuation, but a promise of love's continuity and healing beyond the need for the institution's protective architecture.

So the refined fulfillment model is not "marriage continues." It is "the goods you loved in marriage continue, purified, and marriage as institutional governance is no longer required."

7.3 The crucial upgrade: fulfillment must preserve particularity while dissolving scarcity

Here is where the entire paper either succeeds or fails. The central anxiety behind "no marriage" is not really about the legal title. It is about particularity. People fear becoming interchangeable. They fear that the beloved will become merely "one among many." They fear that the shared story will be dissolved into generic fellowship. This fear is not mere possessiveness; it is the human insistence that love names a real person and a real history.

If fulfillment cannot preserve particularity, it collapses into abolition. If it preserves particularity by maintaining scarcity-based exclusivity, it collapses into continuationism. Therefore fulfillment must achieve a difficult synthesis:

- preserve particularity
- dissolve scarcity

This is the "specialness without rivalry" claim. It says: the beloved can remain uniquely beloved to you, not because others are excluded, but because uniqueness does not require exclusion. A child can love both parents uniquely without rivalry. Friends can remain uniquely dear without needing to own each other. Even in this life we see hints of non-competitive particularity, though it is fragile.

In the redeemed state, the conditions that force love into defensive possession are removed. Fear is healed. Rivalry is healed. Scarcity is healed. Under those conditions, particularity can remain without needing exclusivity as a weapon. The "mine" of love can become stewardship

rather than property. The bond can remain true without being structured as a fortress against others.

This upgrade is crucial because it answers theodicy. If God is good, then God must be able to perfect love without requiring love to remain scarcity-bound. God must be able to preserve the truth of "this person mattered to me in a unique way" while removing the fear that makes that truth anxious and possessive.

Fulfillment, properly refined, becomes the claim that resurrection does not flatten love; it liberates love from the conditions that made love defensive. The end of marriage-as-institution is then not a denial of particular bonds but the end of the scarcity governance that marriage provided.

7.4 Pastoral diagnostics: which model can comfort the grieving without lying?

Models must be tested where theology becomes care. Grief is the truth-teller. It reveals whether a doctrine is being used to honor love or to control it. This subsection proposes pastoral diagnostics—questions that help a pastor, counselor, or believer evaluate whether an interpretation is truthful, tender, and formation-safe.

Diagnostic 1: Does the model require belittling marriage to defend heaven?
If the comfort comes by saying "marriage doesn't matter," it fails no-trivialization. It may be doctrinally tidy but morally thin. A pastor should suspect any view that stabilizes hope by mocking what the grieving loved.

Diagnostic 2: Does the model comfort by amnesia or indifference?
If the model implies "you won't care then," it fails no-erasure and becomes cruelty. It portrays redemption as emotional flattening rather than healed love.

Diagnostic 3: Does the model promise what Scripture does not promise?
If the model says "you will definitely remain married as you are now," it risks fantasy. It may be emotionally soothing, but it undermines trust when believers later see the textual denial.

Diagnostic 4: Does the model preserve personal recognition and shared history?
A model that cannot say "you will be yourself, your beloved will be themselves, and your shared story will not be negated" will not comfort without lying. The grieving do not need a legal guarantee; they need a moral assurance that love is not treated as a mistake.

Diagnostic 5: Does the model handle exclusivity as medicine rather than essence?
If exclusivity is treated as the essence of love, the model will either demand eternal rivalry protection or will erase particularity. A healthy model treats exclusivity as a protective structure under fallen conditions and expects love to become non-competitive in the final state.

Diagnostic 6: Does the model preserve God's moral credibility?
The final test is theodicy: does the model allow a believer to say, without bitterness, "God is good," even when the believer has lost a spouse? If the model makes God appear as one who gives deep love and then declares it obsolete, it will not sustain faith under grief. If it makes God appear as one who preserves and perfects the goodness of love while removing the conditions that broke it, it has a chance to sustain faith.

When these diagnostics are applied, the refined fulfillment model generally fares better. It can be truthful about the end of marriage-as-institution while still offering morally serious comfort: your love was real; your grief honors a real good; and God's redemption will not mock the good God gave. The refined abolition model can be pastorally workable only if it moves toward the same assurances about personhood, recognition, and particularity—at which point it begins to converge with fulfillment anyway.

The next sections will build on this conclusion by explaining why exclusivity exists under scarcity, what resurrection must promise if God is good, and how the idea of "particularity without possession" can become a coherent formation vocabulary for churches speaking to grief.

8. Why Exclusivity Exists: Scarcity, Vulnerability, and the Economy of "Mine"

One of the hidden engines of this entire debate is the word "mine." In marriage, "mine" can be tender and holy: "my beloved," "my spouse," "my home," "my family." But "mine" can also be anxious and corrosive: "my rights," "my control," "my claim," "my jealousy." The moral ambiguity of "mine" is not a defect of marriage; it is a symptom of the world marriage must inhabit.

Exclusivity is where "mine" becomes formal. Marriage does not merely permit love; it structures love as exclusive priority in particular domains: sexual union, shared household, primary loyalty, and often a public identity as a unit. This exclusivity is frequently treated as the essence of marriage, as if marriage is primarily a romantic arrangement that happens to be exclusive. In reality, exclusivity is a protective mechanism designed to stabilize love under conditions that would otherwise fracture it: scarcity, vulnerability, competitive desire, and the inevitability of loss.

This section argues that exclusivity is best understood as a moral technology for love in a fallen world. It is not simply a restriction. It is a strategy that converts volatile desire into stable care. It reduces rivalry, contains risk, and concentrates responsibility. When we see exclusivity in this way, we can understand why it is central now without being final. The eschatological question is not whether "mine" disappears, but whether "mine" is purified from possession into stewardship—so that particularity remains without rivalry.

8.1 Exclusivity as anti-rivalry technology: stabilizing love under competitive desire

Human desire is not only strong; it is socially reactive. People do not merely desire; they compare. They fear replacement. They seek validation through being chosen. In a world shaped by insecurity, attention becomes currency and affection becomes status. That is rivalry, and rivalry is one of the primary ways eros is corrupted.

Exclusivity functions as anti-rivalry technology in at least four ways.

First, it removes the need for constant competitive bidding. Without exclusivity, many couples would be forced into endless negotiation about boundaries, attention, and loyalty. In theory, perpetual negotiation could be mature. In practice, it often becomes exhausting and destabilizing, especially in a world where desire is easily weaponized by insecurity and temptation.

Second, it reduces the number of active threats to the bond. The human heart can sustain deep love with fewer fears than it can sustain deep love with many fears. When a marriage includes a clear boundary of sexual and relational fidelity, the bond becomes a safer place for vulnerability. The point is not to eliminate risk completely—humans can still betray—but to create a moral norm that discourages scattering.

Third, it simplifies accountability. Exclusivity does not merely say “you may not do X.” It says “this is the person to whom you owe primary fidelity.” It creates a clear moral axis. That clarity matters because many relational harms happen not through overt malice but through drift: ambiguous friendships, emotional affairs, soft betrayals, and incremental boundary erosion. Exclusivity gives the marriage a boundary that can be named without shame.

Fourth, it concentrates love into responsibility. In a competitive desire economy, “I love you” can remain sentimental and thin. Exclusivity, when healthy, forces love to land on duties: show up, provide, protect, forgive, keep promises, carry burdens. Love becomes less theatrical and more real.

In this sense, exclusivity is not merely romantic. It is an anti-chaos instrument. It helps prevent eros from dissolving into a scattered craving for novelty and validation. It builds a zone where mutual trust can grow.

But this also reveals its contingency. If exclusivity is largely a response to rivalry and competitive desire, then it belongs to a world where rivalry is active. If rivalry is healed, exclusivity does not disappear as “love,” but it may no longer be necessary as a defensive perimeter. The eschatological question becomes whether love can remain particular without requiring “mine” to function as a boundary against others.

8.2 Permanence as anti-death protest: vows as resistance to abandonment and loss

Marriage vows do more than promise fidelity. They protest the conditions of history. A vow is an act of resistance against the temporariness that haunts human life. When two people say “until death,” they are acknowledging death’s claim and simultaneously refusing to let death define the meaning of love.

Permanence therefore has a dual role.

It is moral stability. It tells desire: you are not sovereign. You will be governed by covenant. You do not get to evaporate when you cool. This stability is not repression; it is the conversion of impulse into vocation.

It is existential defiance. The vow says: even though everything breaks, we will not break by choice. Even though bodies fail, we will remain. Even though the world is unreliable, we will become reliable to one another.

That is why marriage is so morally shaping. The vow is a thick promise that makes the self accountable over time. It forms a person who can be counted on.

But permanence is also tied to death. The drama of permanence is heightened because death is real. If there were no death, the promise “forever” would not carry the same pathos. In a world where abandonment and mortality are real possibilities, vows function as anti-death protest: they build a pocket of continuity inside a discontinuous world.

This helps interpret the eschatological statement. If resurrection defeats death, then the anti-death protest function changes. The vow-as-resistance is no longer needed in the same way because the primary enemy that made the vow tragic is gone. That does not make the vow meaningless. It makes the vow successful in a deeper sense: it trained fidelity under pressure, and fidelity can now exist without the looming threat that made it heroic.

So the question is not “Will permanence be abolished?” The question is “Will permanence still need to be sworn as protest?” In resurrection, permanence may be a given condition rather than a vowed defense. The moral load carried by vows in history can be transfigured into a stable reality rather than an embattled achievement.

8.3 Household structure as protection: dependency, children, and the moral ecology of care

Exclusivity is not only about romance and sexuality. It is about care. The household is where the moral and economic ecology of care becomes concrete: food, shelter, labor, rest, illness, finances, and the long work of raising children and caring for aging bodies.

The household structure matters because humans are dependent creatures. We are dependent as infants, often dependent during illness, and dependent again in old age. Even in healthy

adulthood, we are not autonomous machines; we need care, companionship, and practical support. Marriage, as a household-forming institution, creates a stable site where dependency is not treated as failure but as part of life.

Children intensify this logic. Human children require long-term, high-investment care. They need not only provision but moral formation. They need a stable relational environment where trust can grow. The marriage household is one of the primary ways societies have historically built that stability. Even when modern contexts vary, the underlying vulnerability remains: children need durable love.

Exclusivity stabilizes household care in several ways.

It assigns responsibility. When a spouse is sick, when a child is born, when finances collapse, care must not be optional. Exclusivity turns care into obligation.

It creates continuity. Care is not a single act. It is repeated presence. The household provides a continuity mechanism.

It protects vulnerability. A household is a place where weakness can be exposed without being exploited. Exclusivity helps create the trust needed for that exposure.

It anchors identity. People do not only survive through care; they become through care. Household life shapes identity through routines of giving and receiving.

All of this is tied to the mortal condition. Dependency is amplified by bodily frailty and by the generational cycle. If resurrection ends death and heals the frailties that make care a defensive necessity, then the household-as-protection function may change. Care will not disappear—love without care would not be love—but care may no longer require the same protective household enclosure to be reliable.

This is another reason “no marriage” can be interpreted as “no household distribution system based on scarcity and vulnerability.” The goods of care remain, but the social technology tailored to mortal dependency may not be required in the same way.

8.4 Eschatological implication: when scarcity ends, exclusivity need not carry the same moral load

Now we can state the implication without evasiveness. Exclusivity carries a heavy moral load in this life because scarcity and vulnerability are real. Scarcity is not only financial; it is existential: limited time, limited attention, limited health, limited trust, limited safety. Vulnerability is not only physical; it is relational: fear of abandonment, fear of betrayal, fear of humiliation, fear of being replaced.

Exclusivity functions as a structure that absorbs these pressures so that love can survive. It is a boundary that protects particularity in a world where particularity is easily threatened by rivalry. It is a mechanism that concentrates responsibility in a world where responsibility is easily evaded. It is a moral technology that turns longing into stable care.

But if resurrection means the defeat of death, the healing of fear, and the end of rivalry, then exclusivity need not carry the same moral load. The final state does not need a defensive perimeter around love if love is no longer under threat from scarcity-driven competition.

This is where the phrase "particularity without possession" becomes more than a slogan. It becomes the structural claim that redeemed love can preserve uniqueness without requiring exclusivity as anti-rivalry technology. The beloved can remain uniquely beloved not because others are excluded, but because there is no longer a competitive scarcity economy that turns love into a zero-sum game.

In the age to come, "mine" must be transfigured. If "mine" remains possessive, heaven remains anxious. If "mine" is erased, heaven becomes impersonal. The only coherent option is purification: "mine" becomes a word of stewardship, gratitude, and particular history—without fear-driven ownership.

So the eschatological implication is not that exclusivity was bad. It is that exclusivity was doing a job. It was carrying a burden. When the burden is removed, the job changes.

This clarifies why the end of marriage-as-institution need not be the end of love's depth. It can be the end of love's defensiveness. It can be the moment when the goods that marriage carried—fidelity, delight, care, and shared history—are no longer guarded by scarcity structures but become stable realities in a communion where no one must cling in fear of replacement.

The next step is to specify what resurrection must promise if God is good: continuity of personhood, recognition, particular love, and healed communion. Only then can the theodicy of eros move from explanation of exclusivity to a constructive account of how love can be both expanded and preserved without rivalry.

9. What Resurrection Must Promise If God Is Good

Theodicy is not satisfied by saying, "The Bible says so." Theodicy asks whether the picture of God implied by an interpretation is morally coherent and pastorally survivable. When we reach the question of marriage and family in the resurrection, the moral stakes become precise. If God is good, then resurrection cannot be merely survival, and it cannot be merely a new set of experiences that makes us forget the old. Resurrection must be the healing and fulfillment of creaturely life, including the loves that formed us. It must be continuity through transformation:

the person remains, the good remains, the wounds are healed, and the conditions that made love fragile are removed.

This section proposes what resurrection must promise in order for God's goodness to remain credible in relation to eros, marriage, and family. These are not claims about the detailed mechanics of the age to come. They are the moral minimums that must be preserved if the story is to be redemption rather than replacement.

The central thought is simple: heaven cannot be good by making us care less about what was truly good here. Heaven must be good by making love more truthful, more stable, and less fear-driven—while keeping the reality of persons and their shared histories intact.

9.1 Continuity of personhood: recognition, memory, gratitude, and shared story

The most immediate moral necessity is continuity of personhood. If resurrection does not preserve the self, then talk of justice, love, and healing becomes incoherent. You cannot redeem someone by replacing them with a different entity who merely inherits their name.

Continuity of personhood includes at least four elements that matter directly for theodicy of eros.

Recognition: In any meaningful hope, people must be recognizable as themselves. Recognition is not just facial identification; it is the intuition, "this is you." Without recognition, the promise of reunion becomes hollow. The grieving spouse's fear—"will I lose my person forever?"—cannot be answered if the resurrected are functionally anonymous.

Memory: Shared life is built from remembered reality. If memory is erased, then the love story is erased. Some theologians and preachers, trying to solve grief, imply that memory of pain will be removed. But if memory removal becomes sweeping, it risks turning redemption into amnesia. The better moral claim is not that memory disappears, but that memory is healed: remembered without being a continuing wound, integrated without bitterness, placed within a larger wholeness.

Gratitude: Gratitude is the moral form of memory. It preserves goods without clinging. It says: this mattered, this was real, this was gift. Gratitude is essential because it allows continuity without possession. In the age to come, gratitude must be one of the ways particular histories remain true without becoming rivalry economics.

Shared story: A marriage is not merely two individuals who liked each other. It is a shared narrative: a thousand ordinary acts, crises endured, forgiveness given, children raised, promises kept, failures repaired. If resurrection severs shared story, it implicitly trivializes the moral texture of embodied life. Therefore a coherent hope requires that shared story remains part of

the truth of persons. The story may no longer function as a legal bond, but it must remain as reality: “we lived this, and it shaped us.”

This continuity does not require that the institution of marriage continue. It requires something deeper: that the persons who loved are still themselves, with their histories intact, so that love is not retroactively declared meaningless.

9.2 Continuity of love: not erased bonds but healed bonds without fear

The second moral necessity is continuity of love. Not continuity in the sense of continuing every earthly structure unchanged, but continuity in the sense that bonds are not erased or treated as childish.

This is where pastoral harm often occurs. Some believers are told that the grieving spouse must “let go” because clinging to spousal love is selfish. But love is not selfish by default. The pain of separation is evidence that love was real. A good God does not solve this by declaring that the bond was temporary in a way that makes it ultimately negligible.

Continuity of love requires three claims.

The bond remains real: If two people were joined in faithful love, the truth of that joining must not become false. Even if the institutional form ends, the love does not become retrospectively irrelevant. The relationship is part of reality’s moral history.

The bond is healed: Earthly love is rarely free of fear. Fear of abandonment, fear of betrayal, fear of not being enough, fear of loss. In heaven, love must be purified of fear-driven grasping. This is the key move of the entire paper: love remains, but it no longer needs to behave defensively. It is not less love; it is love without panic.

The bond is free of rivalry: If love remains under competitive conditions—if one person’s specialness implies another person’s exclusion as a threat—then heaven would reproduce the scarcity economy. Healed love must be able to remain particular without being possessive, and to rejoice in the beloved without needing the beloved to be “mine” in the sense of property.

This continuity-of-love promise is what allows theodicy to speak without cruelty. It gives the grieving spouse something truthful to hold: not a fantasy of “we will just be married again,” and not a harsh dismissal of love, but a moral assurance that what was true remains true and will be fulfilled without fear.

9.3 Continuity of embodiment: intimacy without the old vulnerability economy

A third necessity is continuity of embodiment. This is not a technical claim about biology; it is a moral claim about what kind of salvation Christianity proclaims. If salvation is the redemption of

creation, then embodied life is not an embarrassment to be escaped. It is part of what must be healed.

Embodiment matters for eros because eros is not merely mental affection. It includes presence, touch, shared space, shared time, and bodily communion. People fear that "no marriage" implies a disembodied, sterile heaven because they assume intimacy requires the exact same sexual economy and household structure found here. But embodiment can continue without that economy, and intimacy can continue without the vulnerability structures that make intimacy fragile now.

The phrase "old vulnerability economy" names how bodily life functions under death: bodies can be injured, used, exploited, abandoned, and lost. Under that economy, intimacy needs defenses: exclusivity boundaries, household protection, covenant enforcement, and a sense of "mine" that can easily become possessive because the beloved can be taken away.

If resurrection defeats death and heals fear, embodiment can remain while the vulnerability economy changes. Intimacy then becomes possible without being constantly managed by threat. Presence is no longer shadowed by "I will lose you." Touch is no longer shadowed by "you could harm me." Desire is no longer shadowed by "I must secure my claim."

This is a crucial piece of theodicy: heaven must not solve love by removing the body, because for most humans the body is where love actually lived. Instead, heaven must solve love by removing the threats that made embodied love unstable and defensive.

So continuity of embodiment means: real presence, real knowing, real joy—without the fear-driven structures that made those realities precarious here.

9.4 Enlargement of family: communion beyond pairing without flattening particular loves

The final necessity is the enlargement of family. The New Testament repeatedly presents the redeemed community as a kind of family—a communion of persons bound together in love. If marriage is not the final organizing institution, something else must be. That "something else" is not solitude; it is enlarged communion.

But enlargement creates its own anxiety. People fear that communal love will flatten particular love: if everyone is "family," then no one is uniquely cherished; if everyone belongs to everyone, then the unique bond between spouses dissolves into generic fellowship.

Therefore, theodicy requires a specific kind of enlargement: communion beyond pairing without flattening particular loves.

This can be stated as a double promise.

Promise one: pairing is not the ceiling of love. Marriage is not the maximum intimacy God can provide; it is a created good that anticipates greater communion. This promise protects against idolatry and against despair. It says: God is not asking you to accept less; God is preparing more.

Promise two: particularity is not erased by communion. The enlargement of family must not turn persons into interchangeable units. It must preserve the truth of unique histories, unique gratitude, unique joys. In a redeemed community, one can be deeply connected to many without erasing the unique bonds formed in time.

We already have partial analogies for this in earthly life, though they are imperfect. A parent can love multiple children with unique love, not a diluted generic love. A person can have deep friendships that are not competitive with marriage when fear is not driving the system. A community can hold many relationships where particular bonds are honored rather than threatened. These are fragile here because scarcity and fear disrupt them, but they hint at how enlargement can occur without flattening.

So the enlargement of family is not the abolition of special love; it is the removal of rivalry as the price of special love. It is communion in which no one must cling to be secure, and no one must be excluded for someone else to be cherished. This is what "specialness without scarcity" means in concrete social terms.

Taken together, these four promises—continuity of personhood, love, embodiment, and enlarged family—form the moral core of a credible resurrection hope. They allow the doctrine "no marriage in the resurrection" to be heard not as a divine dismissal of love, but as the claim that the protective institution is no longer needed because love is no longer under threat.

The next step is to name this synthesis explicitly: particularity without possession. We will argue that this is the only account that can satisfy theodicy criteria without contradicting the textual boundary and without breaking the grieving heart.

10. The Central Proposal: Particularity Without Possession

The argument of this paper has been building toward a single synthesis. If Scripture denies marriage as an institution in the resurrection age, and if God is good, then the goods of marriage cannot be trivialized, erased, or treated as bait. Yet if the final life is truly beyond death and scarcity, then the scarcity-architecture of love—exclusive-priority as anti-rivalry technology, vows as protest against abandonment, household enclosure as protection against vulnerability—cannot be the final structure either. The solution cannot be "we stay married exactly as now" (fantasy), and it cannot be "you won't care then" (cruelty). It must be a third

thing: love preserved as particular, but purified of the possessive economy that makes particularity fragile.

That third thing can be named with a phrase that sounds simple but carries a heavy theological load: particularity without possession.

"Particularity" means: the beloved remains *this* person, with *this* shared history; love remains uniquely shaped by a real story; recognition, memory, and gratitude remain intact. "Without possession" means: the beloved is not "mine" in the anxious property sense; love is not guarded by rivalry; joy is not defended by exclusion; intimacy is not stabilized by fear. The beloved can be uniquely loved without being owned. This is not a sentimental slogan. It is a moral claim about what redemption must accomplish if God is good.

10.1 "Specialness without scarcity": how love can remain unique without rivalry

The most emotionally charged fear behind "no marriage" is the fear of flattening. People worry that if everyone belongs to everyone, then no one is uniquely loved. They imagine a kind of spiritual socialism of affection: equalized, polite, and thin. They imagine the beloved as dissolved into a crowd, the marriage story as demoted to a footnote. That is why "specialness" matters. Not because people want to possess, but because they want the truth of their love to remain true.

But "specialness" is often purchased with scarcity. In this life, specialness is stabilized by exclusivity because exclusivity reduces rivalry: "you are the one, not one among many." Scarcity provides the emotional voltage. The fear of losing the beloved intensifies the bond. The risk of replacement makes "chosen-ness" feel like oxygen. This is why romance can become addicted to crisis. The intensity of love becomes tied to the threat that love might be taken away.

If heaven is beyond death and beyond rivalry, then specialness cannot depend on scarcity. Specialness must be re-grounded in something else: uniqueness.

Uniqueness is not scarcity. Uniqueness is the irreducible reality of a person and a story. Your spouse is not special because others are excluded; your spouse is special because no one else is your spouse in the history you lived. The shared story cannot be replicated by another person. The moral texture of "we endured this, we forgave this, we built this, we bore this, we learned this" is not interchangeable. That is specialness rooted in truth, not in rivalry.

"Specialness without scarcity" therefore proposes that the final state preserves uniqueness without needing exclusion. It is possible—at least morally conceivable—that a world could exist where many bonds are deep and intimate without competitive threat, because love is not a zero-sum resource and joy is not defended by property claims. In such a world, the beloved can

remain uniquely beloved, not because others are kept away, but because love is no longer haunted by the question, “Am I enough to keep you?”

The key here is that rivalry is not a requirement of specialness; rivalry is a symptom of insecurity. If insecurity is healed, rivalry can dissolve while specialness remains.

So “specialness without scarcity” is not the claim that everyone loves everyone identically. It is the claim that love’s uniqueness does not require exclusivity as a defensive wall, because love is no longer vulnerable to replacement.

10.2 Difference between belonging and owning: love freed from anxious grasping

The word “mine” can name two very different realities.

Belonging: “You belong with me,” “we belong to each other,” can name mutual commitment, mutual care, mutual presence. It can be a language of covenant and home. It does not have to imply property.

Owning: “You are mine,” can become the language of possession: control, entitlement, jealousy, surveillance, the demand that the beloved’s attention prove one’s worth. Owning is not love; it is fear wearing love’s clothes.

In a fallen world, belonging and owning easily collapse into each other. Because we can lose, we cling. Because we can be replaced, we demand proof. Because we fear abandonment, we tighten control. The result is anxious grasping: love that tries to secure itself by reducing the beloved’s freedom.

Marriage can restrain this corruption by imposing moral limits: fidelity, accountability, vows. Yet even within marriage, anxious grasping can persist. This is why the paper insists that no earthly marriage is perfect. Marriage can hold love steady, but it cannot completely purge fear.

Therefore the moral goal of redemption is not simply to keep belonging and remove marriage. The goal is to preserve belonging while removing owning.

“Particularity without possession” means that the redeemed form of love retains the “we” without turning the “we” into a property claim. The beloved is still uniquely related to you by shared story and gratitude, but the beloved is not an object to be secured. Love becomes free of anxious grasping because the conditions that drive grasping—death, rivalry, insecurity—are healed.

This also reframes jealousy. Jealousy is not always a sign of love; it is often a sign that love has become a defense mechanism for self-worth. In resurrection, self-worth is not negotiated through romantic preference because worth is stabilized by God’s knowing and love. When that

foundation is secure, human love does not need to function as a desperate proof of value. It can be offered as gift rather than demanded as validation.

So the difference between belonging and owning becomes one of the clearest marks of redeemed eros: belonging remains; owning dissolves.

10.3 Desire transfigured: eros purified into joy, delight, and reverent communion

A common fear is that removing marriage removes eros. But marriage is not eros. Marriage is a covenantal structure that orders eros. If the structure is no longer required, the energy it ordered does not have to be annihilated. It can be transfigured.

"Transfiguration" is the right word because it implies continuity through transformation. The thing remains itself in some deep sense, but it becomes radiant, purified, and no longer subject to the corruptions that made it dangerous.

Eros, in this transfigured sense, becomes:

Joy: not the adrenaline of insecurity, but stable delight. Joy does not need a threat to feel real. It is not manufactured by crisis.

Delight: not lust as consumption, but delight as appreciation. The beloved is not consumed; the beloved is enjoyed as gift. Delight becomes reverent rather than extractive.

Reverent communion: not communion as fusion or domination, but communion as mutual presence and mutual honoring. Reverence here does not mean distance; it means a love that refuses to reduce the other to a tool for one's appetite.

This is the deepest way the paper speaks of "eros in heaven." It does not claim that sexual mechanics persist as now, because Scripture does not specify. It does claim that the created orientation toward communion—desire as arrow toward union, home, and life—is not erased but healed. The direction of desire becomes trustworthy. It is no longer double-minded. It no longer oscillates between tenderness and control. It no longer hides shamefully or grasps anxiously. It becomes coherent.

In this way, transfigured eros can coexist with the end of marriage-as-institution. The institutional form was one way of ordering eros under fallen conditions. A healed eros does not require the same ordering constraints. It does not require scarcity-based exclusivity to keep it faithful. Faithfulness becomes intrinsic rather than enforced.

This also aligns with a key biblical intuition: the deepest human loves are not abolished but gathered up into a larger communion with God. Desire is not destroyed; it is re-anchored. The beloved is loved in God, not in competition with God. That re-anchoring is precisely what makes

love non-possessive: the beloved is not the ultimate ground of one's security, so the beloved does not have to be owned.

10.4 A moral claim, not a mood claim: why this answers theodicy better than intensity

It is tempting to treat the problem as emotional: "People feel sad about losing marriage; tell them heaven will feel better." But that approach fails because theodicy is not about mood. It is about moral credibility. A theology that "works" by promising better feelings can still be morally false. It can still portray God as unreliable with our deepest loves.

"Particularity without possession" is offered as a moral claim. It says:

- God's redemption preserves what was truly good and true in human love.
- God's redemption heals the corruptions that made love fragile and fearful.
- God's redemption ends scarcity as the condition of specialness.
- God's redemption does not require erasing personhood, memory, or shared story.

This answers theodicy better than intensity because intensity can be counterfeit. In this life, intensity is often produced by fear. The more threatened love is, the more intense it feels. This is why crises can bond people and why romance narratives often depend on near-loss. But a good God does not need to keep love threatened in order to keep love meaningful. If heaven's love were "intense" in the same way, it would imply that heaven still depends on threat. That would violate the no-scarcity-forever principle.

So the proposal deliberately refuses to make intensity the proof of goodness. It shifts the proof to moral qualities: stability, truth, freedom from rivalry, freedom from fear, and the preservation of real goods.

This is also why the proposal can comfort without lying. It does not claim, "You will definitely have the same marital status." It claims, "Nothing truly good will be lost, and love will be healed rather than mocked." It does not ask the grieving to pretend their love was small. It asks them to trust that God is capable of preserving the truth of their love while liberating it from the conditions that made it vulnerable.

In summary, "particularity without possession" is the paper's central constructive claim. It is the only path that can simultaneously:

- honor the explicit denial of marriage-as-institution,
- honor marriage as a real created good under imperfection,
- satisfy the theodicy criteria, and

- provide pastoral comfort that is both truthful and tender.

The next step is practical: how can churches speak this way without drifting into erotic fantasy, sentimental denial, or harsh abstraction? What language, liturgy, and discipleship practices can train believers to love deeply now without making scarcity the idol—and to hope truthfully without becoming cruel to grief?

11. Hard Cases: Where Theodicy Becomes Pastoral Care

Theodicy becomes real when someone is sitting across from you with a shattered life. At that moment, the neatness of models evaporates. What remains is whether a theology can speak truth without cruelty and comfort without lying. This is especially true with eros, marriage, and family, because these are not "topics." They are the core textures of human belonging. When those textures are torn, theological speech can either heal or harm.

This section takes the central proposal—particularity without possession—and tests it in pastoral hard cases. The point is not to produce scripted answers. The point is to name the failure modes: continuationism that overpromises, abolitionism that belittles, sentimentality that fantasizes, and harshness that pathologizes grief. The goal is a vocabulary of truthful tenderness: a way of speaking that honors love as real, honors Scripture's boundaries, and honors the grieving as morally serious.

11.1 Spouses: "Will we still be together?" truthful tenderness without continuationism

This is the question that exposes whether a theology is actually humane. When a spouse asks, "Will we still be together?" they are not asking about paperwork. They are asking whether the shared story remains real, whether the beloved remains *their* beloved in any meaningful sense, whether the deep bond they've spent decades forming is treated as a disposable phase.

A pastoral answer must do three things at once.

First, it must honor the question. Do not dismiss it as childish. Do not scold it as idolatry. Do not rush past it with "heaven is better." The question is a moral question: is God trustworthy with love?

Second, it must be honest about what Scripture explicitly says. Jesus denies "marrying and being given in marriage." A pastor cannot promise what the text denies. If a pastor promises continued marriage as an institution, they buy short-term comfort by spending long-term trust.

Third, it must make a strong positive claim where Scripture is strong, without pretending Scripture is more detailed than it is. The positive claim is not "you will be married in heaven."

The positive claim is: you will not be strangers; you will not be interchangeable; your shared story will not be negated; love is not mocked in the resurrection.

This is where the proposal "particularity without possession" becomes pastorally useful. You can say something like:

- The bond you have is real and will not be treated as a mistake.
- The institutional form of marriage belongs to mortal history; Scripture says it does not continue as a social arrangement in the age to come.
- But love, recognition, gratitude, and shared story are not abolished by that denial.
- Heaven is not good by erasing what you are; it is good by healing what broke you.

The key is to give spouses a truthful shape for hope: "together" does not have to mean "married with the same exclusivity boundaries." Together can mean *known, recognized, and united in communion without fear*. The pastor's task is to help the spouse separate the goods of marriage from the scarcity scaffolding of marriage, without diminishing either.

The common failure modes here are easy to spot.

Continuationism: "Of course you'll be married again." This comforts but risks betrayal of trust later when the person encounters the text or a different teaching.

Harsh abolition: "You won't care then." This comforts nobody and turns salvation into indifference.

Vague escape: "You'll be with Jesus, so it won't matter." This treats marital love as an embarrassment.

Truthful tenderness avoids these by being clear where Scripture is clear, and morally confident where theodicy must be confident: God does not heal by negating love.

11.2 Widows and widowers: grief as evidence of love's goodness, not its idolatry

Widowhood is where the debate stops being theoretical. Death does not only remove a person; it removes a world: the household, the routines, the mutual care, the shared language, the long memory, the "we." The widow or widower often experiences not one loss but dozens, stacked daily.

In that context, the church often commits one of two sins.

The first is shaming grief. The grieving are told—sometimes subtly, sometimes explicitly—that continuing to ache is a lack of faith, that deep grief reveals an idol, that a spiritual person would

“rejoice” that the spouse is with the Lord. This is not holiness. This is impatience. It confuses Christian hope with emotional suppression.

The second sin is sentimentalizing grief. The grieving are given “certainty” that exceeds Scripture: vivid romantic images of reunion as restored marriage, which may calm anxiety now but can later produce confusion and resentment if the grieving person discovers the biblical boundary.

A better pastoral approach begins with a moral affirmation: grief is not automatically idolatry. In many cases grief is the proper response to the loss of a real good. Scripture itself legitimates grief; it does not present grief as disbelief. Love without grief would imply love without depth.

So the pastor should say plainly: “Your grief honors the goodness of what you had.” That is not the same as saying grief should never become disordered. Some grief becomes bitterness, despair, or refusal to live. But the presence of grief itself is not a spiritual failure. It is often testimony.

From there, the pastor can reframe the “double loss” experience. Many widows and widowers feel not only “I lost my spouse,” but “I lost my spouse and then theology tells me the bond is erased.” That second loss is often inflicted by poor teaching. Pastoral care should remove that inflicted wound by clarifying: the end of marriage-as-institution is not the erasure of love, recognition, or shared story.

Then, without overpromising, the pastor can offer a stable hope: God is able to keep what was true and heal what was broken, and the final state will not mock the love you lived. This kind of hope does not eliminate grief, but it prevents grief from curdling into a moral suspicion of God.

The pastoral aim is not to rush the widow toward “closure.” It is to help grief remain connected to love and to hope, rather than being twisted into shame or into fantasy.

11.3 Singles: dignity and intimacy without marital status as spiritual credential

Any theology of marriage that is not careful will accidentally insult the single. This is one reason theodicy of eros matters. If marriage is treated as the center of human meaning in a way that implies those without it have a lesser life, then the church becomes a caste system: married as fully human, single as incomplete.

Christian teaching cannot afford that outcome, not only for moral reasons but for theological reasons. If the New Testament denies marriage as an eternal institution, then marriage cannot be treated as the final spiritual credential. If it were, heaven would be a demotion for everyone. That is absurd.

The pastoral need for singles is twofold.

First, to affirm dignity that is not conditional on marital status. Singleness is not spiritual incompletion. It is not a lesser vocation. It is not a waiting room where adulthood is postponed until marriage happens. The church must practice language that honors the single as whole, called, and capable of deep love.

Second, to affirm intimacy without implying marriage is the only home for intimacy. Intimacy is not identical with romance. Community, friendship, spiritual family, and embodied belonging are all forms of intimacy. Many singles experience the church as a place where intimacy is promised in theory but denied in practice. The sermon says "we are family," but the social life is organized around couples and nuclear households. That contradiction is not merely unfortunate; it is a failure of ecclesial imagination.

This is also where the central proposal helps. Particularity without possession implies that the final state is not organized around pair-bonds as the privileged unit. Communion is larger. That means the church, if it wants to be honest, must begin practicing a social life where singleness is not marginal. If heaven is enlarged family, then the church must stop acting like marriage is the only socially legitimate site of deep belonging.

At the same time, pastors must be careful not to weaponize eschatology against singles: "You won't be married in heaven anyway, so stop wanting it." That is cruel. Many singles desire marriage rightly. The pastoral task is not to crush desire but to locate desire within a broader horizon: marriage is a real good, but not the only good; longing is legitimate, but it must not become a verdict on one's worth.

11.4 Trauma histories: guarding against eroticized heaven and against sterile heaven

Trauma is the place where both main failure modes become dangerous.

Eroticized heaven: Some people with sexual trauma have been harmed by religious settings that blurred boundaries—through manipulative "intimacy with God" language, through romanticized worship aesthetics, through the conflation of spiritual surrender with erotic imagery. For such people, talk of "eros in heaven" or "divine intimacy" can trigger fear, disgust, dissociation, or confusion. Pastoral care must never force a person into imagery that violates their safety.

Sterile heaven: The opposite failure is also dangerous. Some trauma survivors have experienced "sterile religion" as a denial of their humanity: emotions treated as suspect, longing treated as sinful, bodies treated as embarrassing. For them, a heaven described as passionless can feel like the final confirmation that their embodied self is not welcome. This can intensify shame.

Therefore the pastoral task with trauma is not to pick one extreme but to practice disciplined, consent-respecting language.

Guardrail one: keep God explicitly centered and non-coercive. Divine love is not predatory. Divine communion is not invasive. When using intimacy language, it must be framed as safe, reverent, and freely received.

Guardrail two: avoid importing erotic metaphors as if they are mandatory. The Bible contains varied imagery: shelter, shepherd, fatherhood, covenant, friendship, adoption, and yes, sometimes bride imagery. But not every image is pastorally appropriate for every person at every time. Trauma-sensitive care allows a person to approach God through images that feel safe and truthful.

Guardrail three: separate desire from danger. Desire is not identical with sexual arousal; longing is not identical with lust. Many trauma survivors have had these categories collapsed against them. Pastors must carefully distinguish: the paper's claim is that desire as orientation toward communion is healed, not that heaven is a romantic fantasy scene.

Guardrail four: refuse the "heaven as emotional anesthesia" picture. Trauma survivors often need hope that includes their full humanity, not hope that reduces them. The goal is not to become less human but to become whole. If "no marriage" is preached as "no desire, no intimacy, no special love," it can sound like the final triumph of numbness. That is not healing.

In trauma contexts, "particularity without possession" offers a safer frame because it emphasizes purification from fear and domination. It explicitly rejects possession, coercion, and rivalry. It insists that love's final form is reverent, free, and non-competitive. That is precisely the kind of love trauma survivors need to be able to imagine without threat.

In summary, these hard cases show why the paper cannot remain abstract. If theology cannot speak to spouses, widows, singles, and trauma survivors without either lying or harming, it is not a theology worth teaching. The central proposal is offered not as a speculative flourish but as a moral necessity: a way of speaking that keeps Scripture's boundary, honors love's goodness, and treats the wounded with dignity.

The next step is ecclesial: how can churches actually adopt this vocabulary and form people in it? What preaching, liturgy, discipleship, and community practices can embody "specialness without scarcity" now, so that believers learn to love deeply without making fear the engine—and learn to hope without turning grief into shame?

12. Failure Modes to Avoid

If the central proposal is "particularity without possession," then the chief pastoral task is not only to teach that proposal, but to guard the community from predictable distortions. The human heart—especially under grief, loneliness, or religious anxiety—will reach for simpler

stories. Those simpler stories often feel comforting or spiritually "strong," but they fail the theodicy criteria: they either trivialize created goods, overpromise against Scripture, erase personhood, or replace moral truth with emotional intensity.

Failure modes matter because they do damage in opposite directions. Some forms of error soothe by fantasy, and then later shatter trust. Other forms of error keep doctrine tidy but break the grieving heart, leaving believers with a God who feels morally unintelligible. Still other errors empower private revelation or ecstatic certainty that bypasses the slow test of fruit.

This section names four failure modes the church must learn to recognize, not to shame people, but to prevent predictable harm. In each case, the goal is the same: to keep hope truthful and tender, and to keep love morally serious.

12.1 Sentimental continuationism: heaven as upgraded romance or eternal pairing

Sentimental continuationism is the simplest comfort story: "Of course you'll still be married—only better. Heaven is your romance, upgraded." It often arrives with vivid imagery: youthful bodies, endless dates, uninterrupted sexual union, the perfect spouse, the perfect home. Sometimes it is framed as "God wouldn't take this away," and sometimes it is framed as "love wins."

Why it is attractive is obvious: it gives grief an immediate antidote. It treats loss as temporary interruption of the same life-script. It also aligns with the romantic imagination of modern culture, where pairing is treated as the central meaning of existence.

But sentimental continuationism fails on several levels.

First, it overpromises beyond Scripture. Jesus explicitly denies "marrying and being given in marriage." One can interpret that denial as institutional, not as erasure of love, but one cannot honestly interpret it as "marriage continues as marriage." Continuationism therefore either ignores the text or redefines it by wish.

Second, it risks eroticizing heaven. The more heaven is described as perfected romance, the more God's kingdom is reduced to an endless version of the same scarcity-driven story, only without inconvenience. This can turn eschatology into fantasy gratification rather than moral transformation.

Third, it intensifies the "setup" suspicion. If marriage is the final form, then why did death interrupt it? If heaven is "the same but better," then the horror of death becomes morally sharper, not softer, because it looks like pointless interruption of what could have simply continued. Sentimental continuationism may calm grief, but it can deepen resentment toward God over time.

Fourth, it reinforces a marriage-centric anthropology that marginalizes singles and non-traditional family histories. If heaven is eternal pairing, then the single person's life becomes implicitly preparatory or incomplete, and the widowed person becomes permanently defined by the loss of "their other half." That undermines the dignity of the person as whole.

The corrective is not harsh abolition. The corrective is the paper's refined fulfillment: the goods of marital love are not mocked, but the scarcity scaffolding of marriage-as-exclusive-institution is not promised as final. Heaven is not upgraded romance. Heaven is healed communion.

12.2 Sterile abstraction: heaven as impersonal light or erased particularity

If continuationism is fantasy comfort, sterile abstraction is doctrinal austerity. It speaks of heaven as "pure spirit," "impersonal light," "merging into God," or "a timeless state where human distinctions no longer matter." This version often claims sophistication. It wants to protect God's transcendence and avoid any whiff of eroticized hope. It also sometimes borrows philosophical language about the dissolution of the self into the One.

Why it is attractive is also obvious: it avoids messy human questions. It avoids awkward discussions of sex, romance, family, and grief. It allows the theologian to keep eschatology clean and elevated.

But sterile abstraction fails the theodicy audit in a different way.

First, it risks erasing personhood. If the self is dissolved, then redemption becomes replacement. Justice becomes incoherent. Love becomes generic. The moral history of a person's life becomes irrelevant. That is not resurrection; it is obliteration with a spiritual label.

Second, it trivializes embodied love. If heaven is impersonal communion without recognizability and shared story, then marriage and family become ultimately insignificant. This violates the no-trivialization principle and leaves the grieving feeling that their love was spiritually embarrassing.

Third, it becomes pastorally cruel while pretending to be reverent. Many people who have suffered will hear sterile abstraction as: "Stop caring. Stop longing. Stop grieving. Become less human." That is not sanctification; it is emotional flattening.

Fourth, it can quietly smuggle in a contempt for creation. If "spiritual" means "less embodied," then creation is treated as a temporary stage to be abandoned. But Christianity's claim is not escape from creation; it is new creation. Sterile abstraction often sounds more like escape than renewal.

The corrective is again particularity without possession: a hope that preserves recognizability, memory, gratitude, and shared story, while purifying love from rivalry and fear. Heaven is not impersonal light. Heaven is personal communion without scarcity.

12.3 Cynical minimization: calling marriage "just a metaphor" and crushing ordinary love

Cynical minimization is often a reaction against sentimental continuationism. Tired of romanticized theology, the teacher swings hard the other way and says: "Marriage is just a metaphor. It's not that important. Stop making an idol out of it." Sometimes this comes from genuine fear of idolatry. Sometimes it comes from discomfort with eros. Sometimes it comes from institutions that prefer controllable piety over messy human longing.

Why it is attractive: it simplifies discipleship. If marriage is "just a metaphor," then pastoral complexity decreases. Grief becomes easier to manage: it can be reframed as misplaced attachment. The church can avoid deep conversations about intimacy, sexuality, longing, and loss.

But cynical minimization is spiritually and morally costly.

First, it violates creation. Marriage and family are not mere symbols. They are concrete goods through which most people learn love, sacrifice, and care. To call them "just metaphor" is to deny the weight God placed on ordinary life.

Second, it crushes ordinary love. Many believers already feel that "spiritual" means "less attached." Cynical minimization trains them to distrust their own humanity. It turns tenderness into suspicion. It encourages people to keep their loves small so they will not be hurt. That is not holiness; it is self-protection wearing doctrine.

Third, it increases despair. If marriage is not only fragile but also theologically demoted, then those who have lost spouses are left not only bereaved but also invalidated: "What you lost wasn't that important." That is pastoral violence.

Fourth, it can create hypocrisy. People still love deeply. They still form attachments. If theology shames attachment, believers will hide their hearts. The result is concealment, not sanctification.

The corrective is moral seriousness about marriage under imperfection: marriage is precious but not perfect; central but not final; a real good whose goods are fulfilled rather than dismissed. The church must honor ordinary love without making it ultimate.

12.4 Intensity as proof: private certainty that bypasses communal discernment and fruit

This failure mode is subtler and, in some contexts, more dangerous. It is the move from doctrine to private certainty based on felt intensity: "I know this is true because I felt it." In grief,

loneliness, or spiritual longing, a person may experience a powerful sense—sometimes in prayer, sometimes in worship, sometimes in dreams—that "my spouse and I will be married forever," or that "God revealed to me what heaven is like," or that "this longing proves this is the final structure."

Intensity can be sincere. It can even be spiritually meaningful. But intensity is not epistemic proof. If intensity becomes proof, two things happen.

First, Scripture gets quietly bypassed. The explicit boundary ("no marrying and being given in marriage") becomes negotiable because the person's experience feels more authoritative than the text.

Second, communal discernment gets bypassed. The church becomes a set of individuals with private revelations rather than a community that tests claims by shared wisdom, fruit, and accountability. This creates spiritual volatility and, in some cases, manipulation: leaders can amplify intensity to control people.

This failure mode directly violates the "reverence plus audit" posture. It replaces audit with affect. It treats feeling as truth rather than as data to be interpreted.

The corrective is not to despise experience. The corrective is to submit experience to formation tests.

- Does the experience produce humility, charity, steadiness, and obedience?
- Does it increase love of God and neighbor, or does it fixate on private consolation?
- Does it produce peace that strengthens faithful living, or does it produce obsession and boundary collapse?
- Does it align with what Scripture clearly affirms, or does it require overriding the text?

The paper's proposal is deliberately framed as a moral claim rather than an intensity claim. It does not rely on private visions of heaven. It relies on theodicy constraints, scriptural boundaries, and the moral nature of love. This makes it safer. It gives believers a hope that does not depend on dramatic inner certainty and does not require denying the text.

In summary, these failure modes cluster into two pairs.

- Continuationism and intensity-as-proof overpromise and risk fantasy.
- Sterile abstraction and cynical minimization protect doctrine by shrinking humanity.

The central proposal seeks a third way: to preserve the moral truth of love while dissolving the fear-based economy that makes love possessive. That is the only path that can remain faithful to Scripture, credible as theodicy, and humane in pastoral care.

The next step is constructive practice: how to teach and embody this without drifting into the failure modes. That means liturgical language, preaching strategies, discipleship habits, and communal norms that train believers to love deeply now without turning scarcity into an idol—and to grieve honestly without being shamed or fed fantasies.

13. Formation and Teaching: How Churches Can Speak Hope Without Breaking Hearts

A church does not fail primarily by having an imperfect doctrine on a difficult topic. A church fails by speaking in ways that wound people at the exact place they are most vulnerable: their loves and their grief. The question of marriage in the resurrection is one of those places. It touches eros, family, memory, loss, jealousy, hope, and the moral credibility of God. Because it touches so much, it cannot be handled by a single prooftext or by a single pastoral cliché.

The church needs formation, not slogans. It needs a stable way of speaking that stays inside Scripture's boundaries, honors marriage and family as real goods, refuses sentimental fantasy, refuses sterile abstraction, and gives grieving people hope that is truthful and tender. This requires a shared vocabulary, shared discernment rules, shared practices, and a preaching strategy that can hold paradox without embarrassment.

The central proposal—particularity without possession—becomes church-usable only when it becomes a formation pattern: a way people learn to love deeply without making scarcity an idol, and to hope without being forced into either fantasy or cruelty.

13.1 A church-safe vocabulary: communion, presence, joy, fidelity, belonging, peace

Words form imaginations. If the church's vocabulary is thin, the people's hope will be thin. If the church's vocabulary is distorted, the people's hope will be distorted. The first task is therefore to adopt a "church-safe" vocabulary—language that can carry deep hope without erotic drift and without dehumanizing abstraction.

A church-safe vocabulary does not ban romance words. It simply refuses to make romance words the primary carriers of eschatological hope. It speaks in terms that are biblically resonant, pastorally stable, and morally weight-bearing.

Communion: Not vague togetherness, but participatory belonging in God and with one another. Communion can hold both expansion and particularity: many bonds without rivalry, unity without flattening.

Presence: Not the sentimental idea of “I’ll feel you,” but real being-with. Presence names what widows most miss: the daily reality of the beloved. In hope-talk, presence resists both fantasy and sterility: it refuses “you’ll just be a spirit,” and it refuses “you’ll just replay your romance.”

Joy: Not adrenaline intensity, but stable delight freed from fear. Joy is crucial because many people equate “deep love” with “high emotional charge.” The church must retrain the imagination: joy can be deeper than intensity, and does not require threat.

Fidelity: Not only marital fidelity, but faithfulness as a moral quality of the resurrected life. Fidelity makes hope morally thick. It signals that what we learned in covenant is not discarded.

Belonging: Not ownership, but home. Belonging names the human hunger for “we” without forcing that “we” into the exclusive-priority structure of marriage.

Peace: Not mere calm, but the end of rivalry. Peace is the social condition that makes particularity without possession plausible. Without peace, the whole proposal collapses into either possession or flattening.

Alongside these, churches can also use words like recognition, gratitude, shared story, healing, and wholeness. These words are powerful because they speak directly to grief: they tell the grieving that love’s reality is honored, not negated.

A practical pastoral tip follows from this: when someone is grieving, lead with these words. Avoid leading with “romance vocabulary.” And avoid leading with “abstract metaphysics.” People need moral-psychological safety more than they need speculative precision.

13.2 Discernment rules: reverence plus audit applied to eschatological imagination

Eschatology is where imagination gets busy. That is not a problem. Humans need imagination to hope. The problem is undisciplined imagination, which either invents comforting fantasies or generates harsh abstractions. Churches need shared discernment rules for eschatological talk—especially talk that touches eros.

“Reverence plus audit” can be implemented as a simple rule set that ordinary believers can remember.

Rule 1: Stay inside explicit Scripture boundaries.
When Jesus denies “marrying and being given in marriage,” do not override that denial with wish or with private certainty. Reverence means receiving the boundary.

Rule 2: Do not subtract goods the text does not subtract.
Audit means resisting the slide from “no marriage institution” to “no desire, no intimacy, no particularity.” If Scripture does not say “erased,” do not preach “erased.”

Rule 3: Distinguish institution from goods.
This is the core interpretive habit. Marriage-as-institution can end while marital-goods remain, healed and enlarged. Churches should teach this distinction repeatedly until it becomes second nature.

Rule 4: Prefer moral claims over mood claims.
Do not argue "heaven is good because you'll feel better." Argue "heaven is good because love is healed, fear ends, rivalry ends, and what was truly good is honored." Mood is unstable; moral coherence is stable.

Rule 5: Test by fruit, not intensity.
If a teaching leads to tenderness, humility, steadiness, and charity, it is more trustworthy than teaching that produces fixation, rivalry, contempt for embodied life, or shame about grief. High emotion is not a truth indicator.

Rule 6: Avoid totalizing metaphors.
Bride imagery is in Scripture, but it is not the only imagery. Shepherd, shelter, adoption, friendship, covenant, kingdom, banquet, and city are also biblical. A healthy church does not let one metaphor dominate and distort.

Rule 7: Trauma-sensitive selection of imagery.
Reverence includes care. If eroticized imagery destabilizes trauma survivors, pastors must not force it. They can offer alternative biblical images without treating that as lesser faith.

These rules are not about policing imagination. They are about making imagination safe: safe for truth, safe for the grieving, safe for the traumatized, safe for singles, safe for spouses.

13.3 Practices: lament, thanksgiving for marriage, honoring family, comforting the grieving

Vocabulary and rules become real only when embodied in practice. Churches form people primarily by what they do repeatedly, not by what they say once.

Four practices are especially important for this topic.

Lament:
Churches must relearn lament as normal, not as failure. Lament gives grief a liturgical home so that grief does not become shame or private collapse. Lament also protects against cheap hope. It allows the church to say: death is an enemy; loss is real; love hurts because love mattered. Lament is the antidote to both cruelty and sentimentality.

Thanksgiving for marriage:
A church that only warns against idolatry will slowly train people to distrust their loves. Thanksgiving corrects this. Churches should practice public gratitude for faithful marriages, not

as propaganda for an ideal, but as honoring a real good under imperfection. This includes gratitude for marriages that were hard, where love was practiced through patience, forgiveness, and daily care.

Honoring family without idolizing it:
Family should be honored as a primary school of love and as a site of moral responsibility. But the church must also honor those without conventional families and those with broken families. Honoring family means honoring care, sacrifice, fidelity, and generativity—not merely celebrating the image of the happy nuclear unit.

Comforting the grieving with truthful tenderness:
Churches should train people in how to speak to the bereaved. Not with clichés. Not with speculative romance. Not with scolding. But with presence, practical support, and moral affirmation: your grief honors real love; you are not alone; the church will carry you. Comfort also includes resisting the temptation to interpret grief immediately as a spiritual lesson. The first act is to sit and bear witness.

A subtle but crucial practice belongs here: telling the truth about "double loss." Many grieving people experience a second wound when they feel theology invalidates their love. Churches can prevent this by teaching, before grief hits, that "no marriage" does not mean "no love," and that particularity is not erased. Then, when death comes, the believer is not hit by a doctrinal shock on top of bereavement.

13.4 Preaching strategy: marriage as real good, not ultimate god; hope as healing, not erasure

Finally, a church needs a coherent preaching strategy. Without one, preaching will oscillate between two extremes: romantic idolization (marriage as ultimate) and spiritual dismissal (marriage as insignificant). Both extremes set people up for either idolatry or despair.

A stable preaching strategy includes four moves.

Move 1: Preach marriage as a created good under imperfection.
This means speaking honestly about marriage's beauty and its burdens. Marriage is a real good, not a "mere symbol." Yet it is not perfect, and it functions partly as medicine under fallen conditions. Preach the dignity of ordinary love, the moral schooling of covenant, and the sacredness of daily care—without romanticizing marriage as effortless bliss.

Move 2: Preach the end of marriage-as-institution as good news, not as negation.
This sounds counterintuitive, but it is essential. The end of marriage in the resurrection can be preached as the end of scarcity governance: no more rivalry, no more abandonment, no more fear-driven possessiveness, no more death interrupting love. The "end" is not erasure; it is transfiguration.

Move 3: Preach hope as healing rather than emotional anesthesia.
Reject “you won’t care.” Reject “you’ll forget.” Reject “your love was small.” Hope is not the shrinking of love; it is the purification of love. Make this explicit. Teach that love will be deeper because it is no longer haunted by loss.

Move 4: Preach enlarged family with preserved particularity.
Teach the community that heaven is not loneliness and not pair-bond centrality, but communion. At the same time, explicitly reject flattening: persons remain themselves; shared stories remain true; gratitude preserves uniqueness without rivalry. This prepares singles to hear hope without marginalization, and prepares spouses to hear hope without fantasy.

A practical preaching guideline follows: never preach “no marriage” in isolation. Always preach it within the creation-fall-redemption map and within the theodicy criteria. If you do not, the text will sound like God’s coldness rather than God’s healing.

When churches adopt this vocabulary, these discernment rules, these practices, and this preaching strategy, the doctrine stops being a scandal that breaks hearts. It becomes a disciplined hope: a way of trusting that God will not mock what God gave, and that the love we lived—imperfect, precious, costly—will be honored and healed beyond the scarcity that made it so fragile.

14. Conclusion: Love Central Now, Love Completed Then

The moral scandal that launched this paper was never simply a doctrinal puzzle. It was the felt suspicion that Christianity might be asking people to love deeply and then accept that love as ultimately disposable. “No marriage in the resurrection” can sound, to ordinary human ears, like a divine demotion of one of life’s central goods. If marriage and family are among the primary places where love becomes real—where people learn fidelity, sacrifice, patience, tenderness, forgiveness—then ending marriage can feel like ending meaning.

The argument of this paper has been that this scandal is not solved by fantasy and not solved by cruelty. It is solved, insofar as it can be solved, only by a theodicy that treats love as morally serious and redemption as morally coherent. That means distinguishing the institutional form that love requires under scarcity from the goods love carries as a created orientation toward communion. Marriage is not perfect. It is precious and compromised at the same time. The final hope, if God is good, cannot be the eternalization of compromise. It must be the fulfillment of the goods without the brokenness that forced them into defensive structures.

That is the meaning of the central proposal: particularity without possession. Love remains particular because persons and histories remain real. Love becomes non-possessive because

scarcity, rivalry, and fear are healed. The institution can end without the goods being mocked. Love can be completed without being flattened.

14.1 Restating the thesis: theodicy requires fulfillment of goods, not eternalizing their broken form

The thesis can now be stated in its simplest, strongest form.

If God is good, then resurrection must fulfill the goods of marriage and family without requiring the eternal continuation of the scarcity-driven structures that protect those goods under mortal conditions.

This implies a layered claim.

First, marriage and family are created goods. They are not "just metaphor." They are morally weighty realities where love is learned and enacted.

Second, no earthly marriage is perfect. Even the best marriages carry fear, miscommunication, injury, and vulnerability. They live under death, and therefore under threat.

Third, the institution of marriage includes protective architecture tailored to those conditions: exclusivity to reduce rivalry, vows as protest against abandonment, household structure to stabilize care in a world of dependency and generational succession.

Fourth, Scripture explicitly denies that this institutional form continues in the resurrection age.

Fifth, that denial does not require the annihilation of love, the erasure of personhood, the flattening of particular histories, or the disappearance of communion. Ending the institution is not ending the goods.

Sixth, theodicy demands that a good God would not solve human longing by shrinking humans. God would solve longing by healing it: by purifying desire, removing fear, and expanding communion without rivalry.

Therefore the final state, if coherent, must preserve what was truly good in marriage—recognition, gratitude, shared story, faithful love—while dissolving the scarcity economy that made exclusivity carry such a heavy moral load. Love central now is love completed then, not love discarded then.

This is why the paper insists that heaven cannot be good by making us care less about what was truly good. Heaven must be good by making love more truthful, more stable, more generous, and less fear-driven—while still honoring the particular loves that formed us.

14.2 What can be claimed confidently and what must remain humble

A disciplined conclusion must separate confidence from speculation. Part of pastoral harm comes from pretending certainty where we do not have it—either to comfort by fantasy or to control by harsh abstraction.

What can be claimed confidently:

- Scripture explicitly denies "marrying and being given in marriage" in the resurrection age.
- Scripture does not explicitly say that personhood is erased, memory is erased, or recognition is erased.
- The end of marriage-as-institution does not logically entail the end of love, the end of intimacy, or the end of particular shared history.
- Marriage and family are real created goods, not merely symbolic teaching props.
- No earthly marriage is perfect; therefore the eternalization of the current form is not morally required for redemption to be good.
- Scarcity, rivalry, fear, and death are central corruptors of love's stability; a coherent resurrection hope must remove those corruptors rather than preserve them.
- Hope must be morally credible: it must honor grief, refuse shame, refuse "you won't care," refuse "it was all just practice," and refuse sentimental overpromising.

What must remain humble:

- The exact social mechanics of communion in the age to come.
- The precise way embodiment and desire will be experienced beyond mortality.
- The detailed structure of interpersonal bonds when rivalry is fully healed.
- Any concrete description that goes beyond moral necessity and textual boundary into imaginative blueprint.

This humility is not weakness. It is reverent discipline. It protects hope from becoming fantasy and protects doctrine from becoming cruelty. It also honors a core Christian insight: God is not reducible to our projections, and the future life is not a simple extension of our current categories.

The proper posture is therefore: strong on the moral constraints, modest on the imaginative mechanics. We can say, with confidence, that God's goodness requires love's fulfillment rather

than love's negation. We cannot say, with confidence, precisely how every relational configuration will be expressed.

This is exactly why "particularity without possession" is a useful proposal. It is not a blueprint. It is a moral constraint: a way of naming what must be true if God is good and if resurrection is redemption rather than replacement.

14.3 Closing charge: honor marriage without absolutizing it, trust God without sentimental shortcuts

The closing charge of this paper is practical, because the question is practical. It is about how people love, how people grieve, and how churches speak.

First: honor marriage.
Honor it as one of God's primary schools of love. Honor its ordinary heroism: patience, forgiveness, daily care, covenant-keeping. Honor the grief of those who lose it. Honor the goodness of the bond without shaming the depth of attachment.

Second: do not absolutize marriage.
Do not make marriage the spiritual credential, the center of meaning, the only home of intimacy, or the final form of communion. If marriage becomes ultimate, it becomes idolatrous by definition—not because marriage is bad, but because it is not God. The church must protect people from that confusion, especially in a culture that treats romance as salvation.

Third: trust God without sentimental shortcuts.
Refuse the easy comfort of "we will just keep the same script forever." That comfort may feel kind, but it risks undermining trust when believers encounter the text and feel deceived. Trust is formed by truth told tenderly, not by fantasy.

Fourth: trust God without harsh abstraction.
Refuse the cold comfort of "you won't care." That comfort is not comfort; it is a denial of humanity. God's redemption is not emotional anesthesia. It is healing.

Fifth: teach and practice a hope that keeps both truth and tenderness.
Teach the distinction between institution and goods. Teach "specialness without scarcity." Teach belonging without owning. Practice lament. Practice gratitude. Practice communal care. Let the church become a place where grief is not shamed and where love is not treated as spiritually embarrassing.

If this paper has a single sentence to leave behind, it is this: love is central now because love is real, and love is completed then because God is good.

Not by erasing what we loved, and not by freezing the broken form forever, but by fulfilling the goods and healing the conditions that made them fragile. That is a hope capable of grief. That is a hope capable of marriage. That is a hope capable of God.

Real references. Expand: 15. References 15.1 Scripture and primary theological sources 15.2 Biblical scholarship on resurrection, marriage, and eschatology 15.3 Theology of love, desire, covenant, and beatitude 15.4 Pastoral theology of grief, attachment, and hope 15.5 Psychology of attachment, loss, emotion regulation, and religious experience

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